

AFTER ALL IT IS ONLY HIM!

And Other Stories

T. Vijayendra

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PREFACE

I make films only for my friends.

Girish Kasarvalli

Once a friend had come back after seeing an East European film. We asked him what the film was about. He enigmatically replied, ‘It was about Life and Death’!

These two words can encompass probably almost all of literature. So my stories in this book too are about life and death.

I had my seventieth birthday in October 2013, and so death can legitimately occupy one’s thoughts. But I hope these stories are not macabre. I enjoyed writing them and I hope the readers too would enjoy reading them.

The book, appropriately enough, begins with a story called Joy. Then there are three stories which, in my mind, are the Requiem series. They deal with alternatives in education, farming and environment issues. They are somewhat satirical and critical stories about the way these issues have been tackled in the last few decades. Instead of writing critical essays, I have written these stories.

The collection moves towards death only when our old friend Nora turns into a murderer by chance. In my last book, she was the good woman of Bilgram. Here she gets away with murder in three stories. Then the last but one story is about euthanasia and in the last story I kill myself! So there! Life and Death!

I live on a farm near the foot hills of the Western Ghats and spend some time in Hyderabad. Several people in these two places have helped me to cope with life and illnesses that accompany age. There are many others in other towns and cities of India (and a few abroad too!) who have helped me with correspondence and with money when needed. I am not going to name them but they will get copies of this book. Needless to say, I am grateful to all of them for having helped me live a rich life. All my life, the only gifts I gave to my friends have been books. So these stories are also for my friends.

Each story is dedicated to one or more of my friends. They have either inspired the stories, or when I was writing them they were in my mind. I feel happy to have put their names there.

T. Vijayendra

June 7, 2014



Joy

For Alka Saraogi

My name is Joy and I am an Italian barber in Calcutta. In this City of Joy of there are many quaint characters and Italian barbers are one of those. For those who are not from Calcutta, I must explain, that Italian does not mean someone from Italy. It means the local road-side barber who sits on a brick, known as 'eent', and his customer, who sits facing him on another 'eent', and hence the name - Italian. So evidently I am poor, 30 years old going on to 40, balding and an eminently ineligible bachelor. Imagine my surprise when a 'bhadralok'-looking lady was unobtrusively following me! But I am going ahead of my story.

You would want to know how, if I am so poor, I am writing a short story in English. Let me begin at the beginning. I was the first baby found wrapped in a cloth sack in front of a church in Sealdah area in Calcutta by Mother Teresa. She was so full of joy that she named me Joy and also gave me an unpronounceable Polish surname from her country. The Mission of Charity began with me!

All this I came to know later at the orphanage, where I grew up. Mother Teresa either forgot me or, let me be charitable, she did not want to embarrass me with special attention. I forgive her.

Authors are fond of describing the horrors of orphanages. The eminent Charles Dickens did it in Oliver Twist. But we children did not know any better. We had food, daily baths and clean clothes. We played, fought and did all the usual things that children do and occasionally some adult pulled us apart and twisted our ears. We soon forgot about such interruptions and went on playing and fighting. We were also taught to read and write Bengali, English and Hindi. We read scriptures in all the three languages and attended Church some times in one language and sometimes in another.

We also had monthly haircuts, and for some obscure reason I began to help the barber. Maybe he was kind, talkative, and welcomed the help and gave me a small tip to buy sweets. Soon I was an apprentice barber and learnt the trade fairly well. Children are quick to learn. Similarly there was a cobbler too, who used to come to polish the shoes of Father Sebastian. Soon I took over his work too and he gave me one third of his earnings from Father Sebastian. I kept all this money in secret hiding places.

By the time I was eight, I noticed that the outside world was calling me. I soon began to vanish for several hours. I had money in my pocket and I acquired boot polish equipment. This allowed me to travel free in trams and I travelled all over Calcutta. I saw everything, the museum, the botanical garden, the zoo, the National Library, Dakshineshwar, Kalibari - everything.

Although I had money in pocket and the road-side food was not expensive, I was apprehensive of using up all my money. I became a classic hoarder. While money in abstract can buy an infinite number of things, money in concrete form can buy only a finite number of things and the more you buy, its ability to buy an infinite number of things diminishes! Don't be impressed – it is

from Karl Marx and someone told me about it.

So I began to think of getting more money. Beg, borrow or steal? Begging was the least problematic but people don't give money easily. I went to a middle class home and told the lady that I was from the orphanage. She asked, 'What do you want?' with an expression 'No' written all over her face. My tongue felt dry but I saw a lot of books lying around. I blurted out that we needed books to study. Her face softened and she brought 5-6 tattered children's books. I promptly went to College Street and sold them for a rupee.

I felt quite elated. It was the first money I 'earned'! Soon my appetite grew and I began to plan my campaigns carefully. The first thing to learn was how to take refusals properly and show disappointments nicely. Often that worked and the lady would pull out a really tattered book apologetically. And if I thanked her profusely, she would feel pleased and ask me to come again. My innocent baby face was also an advantage.

Before I knew, I was actually reading a few of these books that were in good condition and began to enjoy reading them. And in College Street I became friends with many of the second hand book dealers and began to get proper prices. I also learnt the care of old books, cleaning, repairing and putting plastic covers on them. I read an Origami book and learnt to put plastic covers without stapling them. It worked well with paper backs.

I was becoming a voracious reader. The College Street bookshops were like a huge library and I had access to all the books. I could borrow and return them free of charge. One reason was that since I got my books free I sold them also at a cheaper rate and the shopkeepers were very happy with me. They also liked me.

I chatted with many customers and helped them to locate books. I was becoming a guide to second hand bookshops, a book detective. Both the buyers and sellers were happy with me, because I did not charge any commission though some time if an

antique book got sold at a high price I was rewarded with money.

I also met many authors and some quaint ones too. There was this young thin man with a French beard who published only 50 copies of his poems in French. I asked him why in French, he disdainfully replied, ‘In Bengali we don’t have poetry. We have only weeping’. I did not have the courage to ask him what he thought of Tagore. Probably he would have replied that Tagore wrote only songs.

But the turning point came when I met Manoranjan Bepari. He is a Bengali author but is as poor as I am if not more. He did everything, pulled a rickshaw, was a cook and I don’t know what else. But he wrote well and profusely. Through him I met many other working class authors and I joined their organisation, ‘Majdoor Sahitya Sabha’. They would meet irregularly and discuss their stories and bring their publications. But again I am going ahead of my story.

I was getting too old to beg for books for orphanages. In College Street it was impossible to get a shop. Although I still met Father Sebastian, it was becoming clear that I have to be on my own and that I had to earn a living. With no capital I had only two options – boot polish or barber. The latter appeared more lucrative and so I contacted my old barber friend from the orphanage days and became an Italian barber in a lane near Theatre Road.

Most of the customers were gone by 11 in the morning unless it was a Sunday or it was Ashokji. Ashokji always wore Khadi, was unkempt and came for a shave at any time of the day. He was very friendly and soon I learnt that he was Socialist. Sometime he came with his friends too and they talked a lot. He lived on Lord Sinha Road in a posh flat.

After work I used to walk down Lord Sinha Road, down J. C. Bose Road and onto Lansdowne Road. There I would eat lunch on the foot path. The food was good and we ate on benches facing the wall.

There was another reason too. There was a girls' school on the way and I used to enjoy watching them. Now it is dangerous for a poor man to stare at middle class girls. In Calcutta you can get lynched. So I learnt to watch them from behind or sideways when a group of animated girls would chatter with exaggerated gestures.

And it was in Lord Sinha Road that I became aware of being watched by this lady. I was very scared. I thought that she knows that I have dirty thoughts about these young girls and that she is going to report me to the authorities. That is how the mind of the poor works. Always worrying that you have broken some law of the rich and you will be punished. But soon I realised that she was just watching. She will watch me at different places - walking down, watching these girls, eating on Lansdowne Road. But I think she never managed to find out where I worked or lived. After all it is difficult for such a lady to walk down the blind lane where we worked or follow me into the slum where I lived in a hole in a wall.

News flows down to a barber like water to a river. It was not difficult to find that that the lady was an author and that her name was Alka Saraogi and that she is always looking for characters for her stories. And since she is neither poor nor can she go and live among the poor like many male authors have done she gets her characters from talking to the maids and observing the poor in her street. In fact Manoranjan Bepari told me that they listen very carefully to the language we speak so that they can reproduce it and appear very authentic.

Manoranjan Bepari invited Ashokji and his friend to a meeting of the Majdoor Sahitya Sabha. We had seen that they are publishing the writings of the poor and so we thought may be some of us would find a publisher. Ashokji came readily and talked very nicely to all of us. He recognised me as the barber who shaved him and asked me if I wrote. I was very abashed and said I can't even think about it. He invited me to his place and

said let us talk about it.

One day I went to his place and to my utter surprise and horror, there was this lady - Alka Saraogi. I was stupefied. She quickly understood my embarrassment, because she had also realised that I recognised her. She was very nice and polite and left soon. Ashokji told me about her and gave one of her books to read.

The very first story in that book was a short story '*Kahani ki talaash me'* (In search of a story). In the story the author follows an old man in Kolkata streets and visualises the old man as a character in search of a story. Or actually the old man follows her believing that she is looking for a story and in the process sees her talking to the people on the margins. He wonders if he can ever qualify as a character in her story because there is nothing special in his life. He has only been a successful man doing things properly and no more.

After reading it I realised I am going to write this story. May be I am a fool. Manoranjan Bepari, my Guru, told me that these stories look simple but they are very difficult to write.

I am more of a fool in dedicating this story to Alka Saraogi. What will she think?

June 2012



SHIKSHA JATAKAM

For Hredai Sriram

When Brahmadatta was king of Kashi, a Bodhisattva was born into a rich merchant's family. The merchant's name was Jugal Kishor Gupta and he was the richest merchant in the kingdom with the title of Jagat Seth – the richest merchant in the world!

Jagat Seth's caravans traversed the world from Kashi to Cambodia in the East to Kabul in the West, and to Sri Lanka in the South. The two great trade routes – Uttarapath (the northern route) and Dakshinapath (the southern route) were dotted with Buddhist Viharas (monasteries) which also served as resting, trading and banking posts. The monasteries were, therefore, supported by traders. Jagat Seth owned a chain of banks in all these monasteries and his hundis (promissory notes) could be cashed at any of them.

For a long time Jagat Seth had no children. He prayed to Lord Buddha, repaired all the monasteries and gave generous grants to them. Finally he was blessed with a son. He named him Ashish Gupta because he was born due to the blessings of Buddha.

Ashish was a very naughty child and would keep on running away from his mother and nurse. He did not like milk or sweets, preferring fruits instead. Ashish had a dog named Moti and Ashish and the dog were inseparable. As he grew he was sent to a school – Boudharanya. It was the most expensive school in the city, and was also considered to be the best.

The school was full of innovations. The principal interviewed the parents, always looking for a mother who could become a teacher in the school. There was no homework and children did not carry any bags, food or water. The school provided everything. It was a composite business: publishing house, bookshop, cloth shop, tailors, a dining hall and kitchen, and teachers mainly drawn from the parents of the children. They had separate periods for library, sports, handicrafts and music and even a sleeping period for small children. The school also had a tie-up with the Kashi Vishwa Vidyalaya (the local university) and all the children had preferential admission to the university.

Ashish insisted that his dog went to school along with him. So the family retainer, Ramu Kaka, went with him and was with the dog when Ashish was in the classroom. The teachers found that he was always distracted and kept on looking outside the window. Sometimes he would just stand up and remain standing for quite some time. One day the teacher found him talking to someone outside the window. The teacher went closer and found out that he was talking to a sparrow that was making a nest in the eaves.

Ashish: ‘Hey! Sparrow! Be careful. The black cat is prowling around.’ The teacher got annoyed and dragged him to a pillar and asked him to stand behind it so that he would not disturb the class. Ashish began to cry loudly and suddenly Moti came barking into the classroom. The teacher got scared and walked out in a huff. The children cheered.

Ashish had no patience with handicrafts or music, though he enjoyed the library hour when no one disturbed him. The worst was the sleeping period. Ashish could never go to sleep during the day. His cot was near the door where Ramu Kaka and Moti patiently waited and dozed. The teacher walked up and down the row of cots. The moment the teacher's back was turned Ashish would sit up and make faces. The children had difficulty in suppressing their giggles. Eventually the teacher came to know about this and Ashish was exempted from this period.

At the end of the year the Principal sent a report to Jagat Seth: 'Your son is suffering from hyper-activity syndrome and we recommend a change of school.' Jagat Seth saw the report and asked Ashish, 'What happened? Have you been naughty in school?' Ashish, who never told lies, told his father everything. He told him all the incidents including the one when he invited a street showman who moved around with his bear and a pair of monkeys, and performed the monkey's mock-marriage. It had happened during the morning assembly and all the children enjoyed it, but the Principal had been annoyed.

Jagat Seth thanked the principal, paid the school generously and withdrew Ashish from the school. Ashish happily roamed the streets of Kashi with his dog. He would go and play with the children of the fisher folk on the banks of the Ganges. They would lie on the backs of the buffaloes in the river, jumping on and off and playing in the water. Moti loved water and was always dragging Ashish to the river.

There was a school at Rajghat which catered for special children. Their brochure read:

Rani Basanti Devi Centre for Alternative Learning
Life Skills Taught
Equipment to suit the size of the children
Flour Mill
Real Cooking
Gardening

The school had a dedicated group of teachers. Jagat Seth met the principal and asked her about the school's philosophy. The principal, Asha Rani Gupta said, 'We believe that children are natural learners. They want to learn because they envy the size, abilities and power of adults and want to acquire them quickly. That is why the school has all the usual adult activities but reduced to a size which the children can handle. We will happily take Ashish and involve him in a lot of meaningful physical work.'

The children made their own flour and cooked real meals. They peeled vegetables, rolled chapatis, cooked vegetables, dal and rice. They also worked in the kitchen garden using small gardening tools and grew vegetables. They spun thread from cotton on a small *charkha* and wove duster-sized pieces of cloth on a small loom. They made paper products from old newspapers and so on.

Ashish found all this very tame and boring. The food they managed to cook tasted horrid and the pieces of cloth looked like rags. He longed for his swims in the river, floating on the buffaloes' backs or climbing date palm trees and bringing down the toddy pot and putting up a new one. Then he wanted to go raiding the mango orchards with his gang, armed with a knife and packet of salt in his pocket, and taste raw mangoes. In winter they raided guava orchards. So he would quietly slip out of the school. Soon the school found that he was not good enough for them and Ashish decided that the school was not good enough for him. They sent a regret report to the father.

Then Jagat Seth heard about a *gurukul* which claimed:

Acharya Ram Mohan Murthy Gurukul

Real-time life skills

Dairying

Gardening

Grazing, Hunting and Gathering in the Forest

Every Weekend is a Holiday

The school was located on the premises of the Acharya Ram

Mohan Murthy Study Centre. The followers of the Acharya wanted a study centre far away from the madding crowd in sylvan surroundings. It was a large thirty-acre campus with beautiful huts, cowsheds and a large number of trees and a vegetable garden, with the study centre in the middle. The problem was that they had difficulty in getting labour to do the work. The villagers were busy with their own farms and the forest provided all their needs. There was no one to harvest or prune fruit trees, or to make proper compost with the dung which smelled to high heaven.

Then someone got the bright idea of opening a school for young adults to teach life skills. What they meant was to get some young people to grow vegetables, cook, take the cows out to graze, and run the dairy. It worked beautifully. The girls cooked, tended the vegetable garden and milked the cows, while the boys took out the cows out for grazing and collected some firewood and sometimes hunted and caught quails, partridges and jungle fowl.

Ashish enjoyed taking the cows out and playing in the forest and climbing trees. But he did not keep the cows and calves separate, and the calves drank all the milk. Ashish hated the idea of milking the cows. He thought it was unfair and obscene. He thought that the cow's milk was for the calves. Ashish was happy, the cows were happy, the calves were happy; but the teachers were unhappy. They did not get the milk!

Once late at night Ashish saw two people coming and meeting the guru and talking in whispers. The Guru took them to the cow. Ashish and Moti silently followed. The guru asked them, 'How much have you brought?' They produced four deerskins. 'Is that all?' Then they brought out some smoked meat, some tubers etc. 'You can only get one old cow,' the guru said. 'At least give us two male calves also. They are of no use to you', they haggled. Finally they got one cow and one male calf.

Ashish and Moti followed them to their village and found that they had bought the cow to slaughter. He had never seen a cow being slaughtered and he was very excited. He saw that the whole community was gathered for the slaughter and it was a

festival. Ashish recognised some children and joined them. They had a huge feast with the cow meat and toddy and revelled through the night and the following day.

Next day the guru realised what had happened and asked Ashish never to tell anyone about it. Over the weekend Ashish's father asked him what happened. Ashish always told the truth and so he told him about the cow slaughter. Jagat Seth told him, 'You need not go back to the school, your education is over,' and called the Guru. He thanked him for his son's education and paid him generously and said that his son's education was complete.

3

Ashish was eighteen now and with all his outdoor activities he was very healthy. His father took him into his business and sent him on travels. So Ashish travelled on all the trade routes of his father's business and enjoyed seeing the world, meeting different people and tasting a variety of food and drinks.

After some time his father made him sit in the Kashi office and manage the business along with him. He got him married to a rich merchant's daughter. Her name was Vasundhara and she was very fair and beautiful. She came from a Jain family and was a vegetarian. She was very religious and always very busy in religious rituals and welcoming Jain mendicants. Ashish ate lunch at home but in the evenings he dreaded the prospect of once again eating the bland food. So he went out with his friends and ate fried fish and drank a glass of toddy. Ashish also found her body too soft – her body felt like '*maida*' – white wheat flour kneaded smooth! He was used to playing with fishermen's daughters – brown with healthy skins. Eventually a baby girl was born, who too was very fair. She had Down's Syndrome and was always laughing and singing.

Ashish got very bored with the business and with his family. So one night when his wife and child were asleep he quietly walked out of their life – to seek peace, happiness and the meaning of life!

Next morning Ashish reached a place near Sarnath where mendicants rested. He too lay down and woke up in the evening to find Moti licking his face! He was very pleased and then he found his friend Sadanand grinning. As his name suggests, Sadanand was always very happy and took his life easy. Ashish asked him, ‘Has my father sent you?’ Sadanand grinned and nodded his head. ‘I won’t go back!’ said Ashish angrily. Sadanand grinned again and said, ‘You should know your father better. He does not expect you to come back. All he wants is to be kept informed about you.’

That was typical of Jagat Seth. He never reacted to anything, never scolded anyone, just asked them their news. That was the secret of his success – information is power, he believed. He had only one principle in doing business – buy when prices are low and sell when prices rise, and his costs were more than adequately covered. And he always sold at a price slightly lower than market price and always ensured quality and paid back in full if there was any complaint.

He was like that with his family too. He trusted them, listened to them and kept his counsel. In the morning when the news reached that Ashish left home without telling anyone, he gave it some thought. He also found that Moti was tied up in the night – something that had never happened. He called Sadanand, who was a son of one of his old and trusted employee and childhood friend of Ashish. He told him, ‘I have a job for you. Go to my son and be with him for as long as necessary. You can come back to Kashi as often as you feel like, but you should always know where my son is. You don’t have to report to me regularly but I should know anything worth knowing. Use your judgement. Your salary will be paid to your wife and I may ask her to be my daughter-in law’s companion. Take Moti with you. He will find him. Most likely he has gone towards Sarnath.’

Then he called Vasundhara and told her, ‘Your husband is

not coming back any time soon. Don't wait for him but do something worthwhile. You are educated and capable. I suggest we open a school for handicapped children. Sadanand's wife, Yashoda, will be your companion. We will get wise people to advise us how to run the school. These wise people will not be educationalists, but authors, poets, musicians, painters and artisans'.

5

Ashish wandered for many months and met many mendicants. Some asked him to go back home, some asked him to go to the Himalayas and meet some sages, some asked him to do *tapasya*. His skills in fishing, cleaning the fish, removing the gall bladder carefully, cooking, climbing the palm trees and getting toddy were greatly appreciated and he was welcome in most groups of mendicants. But he did not find fulfillment. So he left them all and went on his own to a forest to meditate. Sadanand and Moti followed him and stayed in the village nearby.

The word went round that a young mendicant was engaged in serious meditation. The village girls got curious and went to see him. Some tried to please him by dancing and singing, but he was not moved. Then they decided that they will try one by one. They tried various antics – bringing flowers, food, singing, dancing – nothing moved him. One girl said, 'I will definitely win.' She took a plate of *kheer* (sweet rice porridge with milk) and said, 'O Shakya Muni, I am Sujata. I have brought *kheer* for you.' She left the *kheer* near him. Ashish always hated milk, so he did not touch it. Next day Sujata found ants crawling all over her plate.

There was one girl, Yamini, who had not joined in all this frolicking. She was a dark girl and lived with her father, Kalidasa, on the fringes of the village near the forest. At first she refused, saying she was not interested in this fair thin guy. Then they teased her and dared her and she finally agreed to give it a try.

It was spring. The forest was full of wild flowers and the butterflies and bees were hovering on the flowers. The male birds acquired the colourful breeding plumage and were dancing and

singing to attract the females, who disdainfully ignored them. Yamini took her breakfast with her. It consisted of the previous night's rice which was kept in water and therefore slightly fermented, fried fish and a pot of fresh toddy from the palm tree. As she approached the mendicant, the smell wafted over and Ashish opened his eyes with pleasure. It evoked all the pleasant memories of his youth! He gratefully accepted the food and drink. He took a big draught of the toddy and enjoyed his breakfast. After a long time he felt at ease with himself.

He followed Yamini to her home and met her father. Kalidasa welcomed him. Ashish said he wanted to live close by. Kalidasa said, 'Let us build a hut for you. Over the next few days they cut bamboo and built a mud and bamboo hut. Moti and Sadanand also came and joined him. Ashish resumed his fishing and brought fish regularly to Kalidasa's home and they all had fish, toddy and rice regularly. Kalidasa taught him how to cut a jackfruit and make wine from it. He taught him how to look for yam and guess its size. When the rains came he also taught him to look for mushrooms. Ashish also learned to make traps for quails and partridges. He learnt to butcher chicken and dress it. The big thing was of course to butcher a pig. Then they had a big feast and lot of people came and ate and drank.

One day Sadanand asked him, 'My dear Satyarthi (seeker of truth), have you found the great Truth?"

Ashish thoughtfully replied 'Yes, in a way'.

Sadanand: 'Tell me.'

Ashish: 'I am not ready with words. I have got a feeling and I am following it.'

6

Ashish went on wandering in the forest, vaguely dissatisfied with his search for meaning, but satisfied in being with nature and enjoying the day's catch. One day Kalidasa told him, 'I will take you to an interesting place.' He took him to a remote part of the

forest and when they reached a big tree an old ape descended from the tree and greeted them. Kalidas was not perturbed because he had met the ape before. The ape was friendly and he even gave them some dates to eat. The ape chattered away and gesticulated but Kalidasa and Ashish could not understand and smiled in a friendly way.

A few days later Vasundhara turned up. Ashish asked her, ‘How come you are here? How are you? What are you doing? How is the school?’

Vasundhara replied, ‘I came to see how you are doing. Of course we know generally what is happening through Sadanand but I wanted to see for myself. The school is doing well. We have 120 children – 32 blind children, 36 deaf-mutes, 12 mentally challenged, several polio-afflicted children and others who lost a limb or hand. We have learnt a lot. The deaf-mutes have taught us sign language, the blind helped us to walk in the dark. We all carry a shoulder-high stick that helps us and each other in a variety of ways.’

Ashish showed her around and cooked for her. Then he took her to a tour of the forest and finally they reached the old ape. The ape came down and gave Vasundhara some fruits. Vasundhara automatically thanked him with a gesture. Suddenly the ape got very excited and started talking and gesticulating wildly. Ashish got a bit frightened and tried to drag Vasundhara away. Vasundhara told Ashish to be quiet and looked at the ape carefully. Then she too started making signs. After some time she told Ashish to go home, as she would take several hours chatting with the ape. She explained that she and the ape were talking in sign language.

For the next several days Vasundhara went to see the ape and her notebook was full of notes that she had taken during her conversation with him. On the last day, she told Ashish that she had discussed with the ape about Ashish’s quest and the ape had given her a gift for Ashish. She tore off a sheet from her notes gave it to him. The sheet read:

There are three ‘Arya Satya’ (Basic truths):

- 1. The aim of all life is to sustain itself and reproduce.*
- 2. All life sustains itself by feeding on other life forms.*
- 3. All life is born, grows and dies.*

What is the right way to live? What is the basis of ethics?

The basis of ethics can be summed up in one word: ‘reciprocity’. What does this mean?

Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you. Be fair. Don’t take more than what you need. Don’t pick fruit, hunt or kill more than what you need to eat. Live a simple life. That will give you a lot of time to think and learn. It will give you more time to relate to others and create a peaceful community around you. That is all.’

Ashish was very pleased and said, ‘So simple and yet so profound! This is what I have been looking for all these years!

7

Ashish acquired a sense of peace and went about life serenely. Once a group of young mendicants, who had been with him during his travels, arrived. Sadanand brought them to him. He happily greeted them and enquired about their health and gave them some toddy and fish and rice.

Then they asked him, ‘You looked very peaceful. Have you found what you were seeking?’ Ashish said, ‘Yes, and I am content.’ They asked him to share his findings. He said, ‘What I found did not come from my wanderings with the mendicants, meeting the sages, reading the scriptures or doing deep meditation. It came from learning from people like Kalidasa and Yamini and observing nature, wild animals and plants. Finally it was articulated by an ape and fortunately Vasundhara was able to communicate with him and convey it to me.’

Then he told them about the three Arya Satya, and the ethics and code of conduct. He concluded that all nature follows

this; only we humans in our arrogance think that we are special and try to conquer and exploit nature. We cause a lot of harm to nature and to ourselves. Realising these fundamental laws and ethics can save us and save nature from the harm we do to it.

The mendicants stayed back and followed his lifestyle, slowly learning survival skills.

8

Sadanand went back to Kashi and told Jagat Seth everything. He also told him that he need not pay him any longer and that he was going back and joining Ashish. Jagat Seth said he was very pleased that his son had reached such a state of learning and had become a sage. He asked Sadanand to keep visiting him as often he liked and to keep him informed.

News reached many people in Kashi that Ashish has attained *Gyana* (knowledge). At first his friends came to him. They listened to him and then one of them said, ‘It is not enough to listen to you. We want to learn how to live a simple life. We want to learn how to live like that.’

Ashish said, ‘Then you will have to spend a year with me here in this forest village and learn from Kalidasa and Yamini how to live a simple life. They taught me’.

Thus a ‘Gap Year Programme’ called ‘Art of Living’ was born. The participants learnt how to build a hut, how to pick fruits and tubers, how to cut them – particularly yams and jackfruit. They learnt to climb palm trees and change toddy pots, learnt to make traps for quails and partridges, to fish, to clean and cut and dress the fish. The teachers were elderly villagers who were skilled in these things and taught them to their own children as well.

Every year groups of young people came and Ashish and Sadanand conducted these Gap Year Programmes. Many left the cities and went to live in villages, becoming artisans or hunters. Some regularly traded with villagers but practised ‘fair trade practices’.

9

Jagat Seth made it a point to talk to many of these graduates of the Gap Year programme. He questioned them closely about the details of the programme. He found many of them very intelligent and gave them jobs in his business. He gave those who were prepared to leave home jobs in his banks at the Buddhist viharas. He asked them to live outside the monasteries and build good relations with the local people and learn to live like them.

He visited his son and spent three days listening to him. He proposed to build a rural campus for the Art of Living School which would house old rural artisans and the Gap Year students. The campus would have all the tools and equipment needed by the artisans. Jagat Seth himself carried some gifts – new axes, a set of carving knives, fish hooks and some tree climbing gear for students which he imported from the far south. He also asked them to build a dormitory for women students and sent Vasundhara and Yashoda for the Gap Year Programme.

10

Vasundhara and Yashoda came back from the Gap Year programme full of new ideas. The School for the Disabled changed completely. Its focus changed to manual skills and group work. Groups of differently-abled children could perform as well or sometimes even better than the so-called normal children. Blind children helped others to work in dark places and at night. Their hearing and smelling capacities were also better developed and in forest expeditions they performed very well. All children learned to carry a shoulder-high stout stick which was very useful in a variety of situations. Most of them were also good at sign language and could communicate from a distance in silence. The name of the school was changed to Ability School. Over the years it grew into the Ability University – the only university in the world for the disabled. Students from all over the world came to study there.

The Gap Year College also grew into the Art of Living University which taught how to live with nature. Ashish's Three Arya Satya and Principle of Ethics were engraved on a rock at the entrance of the University. The focus remained on learning survival skills while respecting nature and the teachers also remained senior members of the rural community. However now the students were from faraway places too. So they included a course on understanding different ecosystems, recognising early danger signals of deteriorating ecosystems and restoring ecosystems. The students went back to their societies but kept in touch with their Alma Mater and sent along the next generation of students.

11

Jagat Seth died and the senior members of the business came to Ashish for advice. He converted the business into a cooperative with all the employees having shares. All the new recruits were graduates from the Art of Living University. Most of the older employees had gone through Gap Year Courses and the business acquired a very eco-friendly nature. They did not trade in weapons or any other destructive materials. In all the branches and banking outposts they had created sacred groves which nurtured local flora and fauna. They lived on local foods and lived in harmony with the local community and nature.

12

After many years, one day Sadanand asked Ashish, 'For many years I wanted to ask you this. You said that life sustains itself by feeding on other forms of life. But why do we live? What keeps us going? How about spiritual sustenance?'

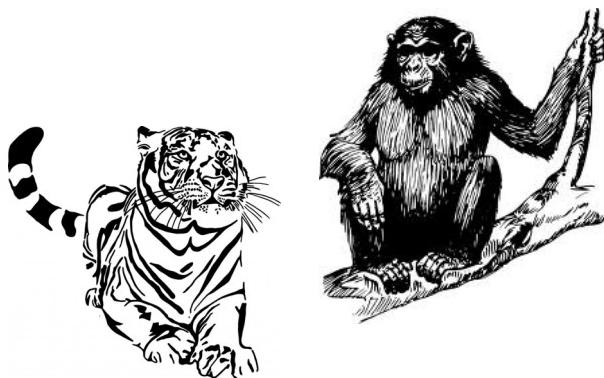
Ashish: 'Animals play. They have fun. Pairs of vultures wheel about for their own entertainment. Hares box. Flocks of birds perform maneuvers in the sky, squirrels wrestle. We humans also play, swim, dive, climb trees, jump across streams. We play with dolphins and dogs and many of us enjoy watching puppies, kittens or squirrels playing. To exercise one's capacities to their fullest

extent, to take pleasure in one's own existence – it is simply what life is. We don't have to explain why creatures desire to be alive. Life is an end in itself.'

Then he laughed and said, 'As to spiritual nourishment you should know better. My life is my message. Spiritual sustenance comes from feeding on the essence of palm trees, their sap, from the essence of Mahua flowers by distilling them, and from the essence of fruits like grapes by fermenting them. That is why they are called spirits!'

March 4, 2014





'THE HOPE RAINBOW - SANGATYA' PERFECT HEALTH DIET

For Hope Rainbow, Shreekumar, Sajai and Usha

“About 12,000 years ago some grass grains discovered a woman. The woman thought she invented agriculture and with this man's enslavement was complete. There was no going back. Draught animals were brought in – the horse, the camel, the bullock and the water buffalo. Many animals were domesticated to feed the growing human race. Agriculture also increased human population. When agriculture began the population was a mere 8 million. In the next 10000 years, at the beginning of the Christian era it became 200 million and in the next 1800 years it rose to a 1000 million or a billion. The next 100 years added another billion and you won't believe it, in the next 110 year it became 7 billion! With so many of them and their domestic animals (there are some 40 species of them) they are eating out the whole Earth endangering the lives of all other living beings and finally including themselves!”

At this Ishmael began to cry and sob uncontrollably.

‘But there is more to Man's enslavement.’ Ishmael continued, ‘There is slavery within slavery. With agriculture Man had food which could be stored for months and years. To produce so much, one group of men enslaved another group of men. So along with

exploitation of Nature came ‘exploitation of man by man’. This slavery changed its form with such names as slavery, feudalism and capitalism! With each form, Man produced more food, more houses and more animals were domesticated. Today man occupies several thousand times his share of the Earth’s resources.’

The Tiger was also overwhelmed with this tragedy. He timidly asked, ‘Is there any hope for Man?’

‘At a fundamental level,’ Ishmael said, ‘there is no hope. Man cannot go back on four legs. He is doomed to have lower back pain and be unable to satisfy himself on his own.

‘However there is hope for us. With the end of fossil fuels his rapacious plunder of the Earth will come to an end. But there is a danger. During the interval, he may destroy much of the Earth with increased Carbon Dioxide emissions, thereby increasing the temperature of the Earth. This is called Global Warming. This can reach a tipping point. That is, Global Warming itself may cause more warming and then most life on the Earth will burn out.’

‘There is another level of hope. Today the majority of human beings are slaves and their conditions are terrible. It is possible that the slaves may revolt and bring down the present era of capitalism. Also groups of ruling classes and nations are constantly at war. They may also contribute to bring down capitalism. But time is running out and only a small window of just 10 years is left for this to happen and save the world. Any continuation of present rate of exploitation of natural resource faces the grim reality of end of most life on the Earth. This includes you, the owl and me,’ Ishmael concluded grimly.

Tiger : ‘But if capitalism is brought down soon then isn’t there a lot of hope?’

Ishmael : ‘Yes and no. Yes in the sense that all life on the Earth won’t come to an end and we can look forward to it. But for Man it is a lot more complicated. He has to undo the ‘achievements’ of

the last couple of thousand years of civilisation. Civilisation means agriculture, slavery and creation of rubbish. But without agriculture the 7 billion people cannot survive. So he has to develop an agriculture that restores the ecology at the same time. That is, he has to practise ecologically sustainable agriculture.'

'It also means he has to undo many other aspects of civilisation and most aspects of the modern society - the entire war machinery and the armies, the big factories, the cities and so on. All this requires a fundamental change in attitude. Very few human beings are aware of the problems and fewer know the solution. So the future of Man is open ended. But yes, life on Earth may go on while human beings keep on fighting among themselves and suffering'.

'And finally, who knows, may be after a chaos of few decades much of civilisation may break down and mankind may recover and come back to their senses. The work of small groups of visionary human beings may bring good results. In stages Man can restore ecology and reduce agriculture and have food similar to the hunter-gatherer stage, that is, no grains, sugar, milk, tea or coffee. Instead he should have fruits, nuts, tubers and vegetables and animal food – eggs, fish, fowl and meat. Some of them working on saving endangered species may succeed and the restored ecology will make all these tasks easier. That will be good for all of us.'

The tiger and the owl thanked Ishmael and the tiger walked back thoughtfully, with the owl on his back. Suddenly the tiger asked: 'Who are these visionary human beings?'

Owl : 'I was waiting for this question. You are becoming a good researcher! We will go and see them.'

This time their travels took them to the foothills of the Western Ghats and they reached the forest behind the Sangatya Farm. The owl had sent messages through the owl jungle post and everybody was gathered there.

Below in the house Shreekumar who woke up the earliest

told Viju that he saw a lot of birds moving towards the hill very early in the morning. Viju sleepily replied, ‘Maybe they are having a conference of the birds!’

In the forest there was much excitement. The local Barn owl introduced the visitors and explained the purpose of their visit. Then everyone clamoured to have a say. There were monkeys, jungle fowl and rabbits. Among the snakes there were a python, a cobra, boa and several rat snakes. And the birds – there were a large number of species - drongo, racket tailed drongo, tree pie, crow pheasant, jungle crow, white breasted king fisher, magpie robin, bee eaters, cattle egrets, small egret, cormorant and even the water hen had come all the way up.

The monkeys took the lead in explaining about the visionaries because they had watched them closely. They said that at present there were three of them. There is this young girl called Hope Rainbow¹ and then there is Shreekumar who is the most hard working of them and there is this wise old monk called Viju. Viju has written a book called ‘Regaining Paradise’ and these people are trying to build the paradise here.

They are a very peaceful people. They have a dog called Dasu who does not chase any animal, just eats, roams around and sleeps. They have two cats and two kittens. Birds go right up to their door steps and the old man Viju just keeps on observing them quietly. When monkeys go around plucking bananas or papayas they say nothing. In fact Hope even tries to talk to them and plays her Ukulele to them. She sings all the time, though she also works very hard. The python here ate up one of the puppies last year but they did not say anything. As you know after eating the python does not move for hours. Rat snakes move freely in and out of their attic and they are happy that some of the rats are driven away by the cat. They have lots of fruit trees – jack fruit, cashew nut, coconut, banana, papaya, mango, guava etc. and have a lot of rice, jowar and dals stored in the attic. And they keep on planting more trees.

The tiger felt very happy to see a forest where human beings

don't attack and destroy. He said he wanted to come and live here. But the Barn Owl said, there are other farmers in the neighbourhood and if they come to know you are here they will come and kill you. Unless all the farms become like Sangatya Farm it is not safe for you.”²

Shreekumar, Hope Rainbow and Viju read the above and decided to have a meeting on this.

Shreekumar said, ‘This is a good critique of agriculture and to some extent a critique of the way we are doing organic farming in India. Let us see what we can do about it. The operative lines in this account appear to be ‘Man can restore ecology and reduce agriculture and have food similar to the hunter-gatherer stage, that is, no sugar, milk, tea or coffee and not much of grains. Instead he should have fruits, nuts, tubers and vegetables and animal food – eggs, fish, fowl and meat.’

Hope Rainbow : Let us start with what we won’t have. The first thing is sugar. Sugar is like the Super Villain - The Red Skull or The Joker of the comics.

Shree : What are you talking about?

Viju : You know these DC comics in the U.S. Like Superman, Batman etc. Now for the story to happen these heroes have to fight villains who also have extraordinary powers. Some of the infamous ones are, apart from The Red Skull and The Joker are Sabretooth, Mastermind, Thanos, Mephisto etc.

Shree : Ok. Ok. Mr. Know-all, let us proceed.

Hope : We will not have any water intensive crops. Paddy may be grown in low lying places during the rainy season where nothing else will grow. The next thing we want to reduce is dairy products.

Shree : That is easy. In Udupi we get very little milk. People here use coconut milk for sweets with jaggery as the sweetener. Coconut will definitely be in – as a drink.

Viju (breaking in): Both as a non alcoholic and alcoholic drink!

Shree (continuing): and as ingredients in all veg and non veg curries, and as oil.

Hope : Yes and we will use no other oil.

Shree : How about grains? What will we do with all the rice which we have harvested?

Viju : We can use them as wages and keep some for guests. We can have grains that grow with less water or are just rain fed. We have all the millets starting from foxtail millet to bajra and sorghum.

Shree : Ok, we will gradually reduce production and consumption of rice and shift to millets as much as possible. For dals, we can have perennial pigeon pea and cowpea. Chickpea is a winter crop and grows on residual moisture. How about tea and coffee?

Viju : Gradual reduction is the name of the game. But we will have it black without sugar and that will reduce its consumption.

Shree : Ok. Now let us see what we are going to have. The operative principle would be, I think, we should use almost everything grown on the Sangatya Farm or things that come from the local area.

Viju : Let us start with trees, because ecologically they are most desirable.

Shree : Correct. They are perennials; they harvest rain water and support many life forms. We have some 40 coconut trees, some areca trees, a few jack fruit trees, mango, banana, papaya, drumstick, cashew, and guava, curry leaf tree, kokum and many other wild trees which for us are mainly a source of leaf fall.

Hope : We should learn to manage the canopy of the trees so that they give us the maximum of biomass. When we think of trees we think only of the fruits. But the leaves are also important: as fodder for animals as well as for mulch.

Viju : This reminds me of Howard who says that agriculture should feed the hunger of the soil, animals and the people. If the burden of feeding the industry is relieved than the soil will have more for others.

Shree : We should look at trees as source of fuel wood also.

Viju : Next in priority are the tubers.

Shree : Yes. We have yams, and we can grow sweet potatoes. We should try out potatoes, onions, garlic, ginger and turmeric too. Tribals have knowledge of several tubers that can be eaten. There is an aerial tuber that is as good as potato. And talking of masalas, we can definitely grow black pepper.

Hope : And vegetables?

Shree : We can and have grown a huge variety. The problem is that they need irrigation and regular attention which we are not able to give.

Viju : We should look at the perennial nature of some vegetables. For example, brinjal and chillies can be grown for 2 to 3 years. We have already talked about perennial pigeon pea.

Hope : This means undoing what was done in the name of development.

Viju : Yes, and having vegetables that closely resemble the wild. In this way they will be hardy and do not have any problems of pests and diseases.

Shree : We have vegetarian guests and I would like to have lot of leafy vegetables.

Viju : They are the easiest to have. Venkat used to say that if you use colocasia leaf rather than the tuber, you will have plenty of yields.

Hope : In my travel across the country before coming here, I have noticed several leaves that are not eaten here. Drumstick leaves form part of the regular diet in Tamil Nadu. In Bengal they eat pumpkin and papaya leaves. Tender tamarind leaves are a delicacy in Andhra Pradesh. Sweet potato leaves are a good source of vitamin C.

Viju : I am getting old and might be getting wiser but I am forgetting a lot. There is a collection of uncultivated greens by Deccan

Development Society in Zaheerabad. Salome helped compile a book when she was working with APFAMGS. There are several unpublished efforts and these are still continuing. Debjeet has recently organised a festival with the adivasis where the uncultivated foods are the major focus. We should get hold of this knowledge before it disappears and also save these valuable trees and plants.

Shree : Viju might say that all this is grass and that he would like the animals that feed on them rather than eat all these leaves.

Hope : I am not opposed to eating meat as you know. But to have the most efficient conversion of calories, only those things that cannot be directly eaten by human beings should be fed to the animals.

Viju : As long as there is meat, I will not complain.

Shree : But let us talk about how to have more vegetables first. In this, I think the creepers and climbers are the best: you have the entire gourd family and large bean family. Besides, gourds such as pumpkin and ash gourd can be stored easily for 6 months.

Viju : The dolichos bean can be eaten raw as vegetable and when the pod dries up the seeds can be used as dal or boiled and eaten with salt and chillies.

Hope : Drying vegetables and using them is the technique that is used in the tropical countries like India (apart from the pickling).

Viju : We should easily be able to design a solar drier or dehydrator.

Shree : Did we miss on anything?

Hope : We didn't talk about herbs that can be used for treating simple ailments.

Shree : Yes, there are a lot of them that can be easily cultivated. Several of them might be growing wild and we need to be able to identify them.

Viju : There are several books on herbs. We should be careful in

not scattering our scarce resources in reinventing the wheel – or what others have already done. When you are talking about health, this reminds me of Fukuoka who says that eating seasonal and a variety of foods keeps people healthy.

Hope : Local and Fresh is the slogan across the globe.

Shree : All this means more work. And that requires more members in the commune.

Viju : We will come to that later. Let us first finish with what we want. What about eggs, poultry, fish and meat or pork?

Shree : We are weakest in this department. First a lot of our trustees and our contacts are vegetarians and we never felt its importance. But with this approach I agree we should do something about it. We have dug up a pond which is quite big and does collect rain water but it is porous and the water does not stay. Viju should contact some of his friends and find out how we can solve this problem. We have, and can catch, some fish in the stream here but it is not much. If we want to eat, as of now we will have to buy it and it can prove fairly expensive. For the rest we need more people.

Viju : Ok. For the present let us conclude what we can have and our menus and then we will have another meeting about manpower. Hope?

Hope : Our diet has fruits, tubers (for carbohydrates), vegetables, eggs, fish, fowl and meat. For masalas, we need oil, salt, turmeric and pepper. We can also have non alcoholic drinks and brew coconut toddy, rice beer, and wines from a large number of fruits on the farm and distil feni from cashew and arrack from the coconut toddy! Theoretically we can grow everything on the farm except salt, which is available within the district and we buy it at Rs. 5 per kilogram!

Everybody : Hurray!

Viju : let us drink a toast to this.

Shree : How about menus? What dishes can we cook with these?

Hope : Cooking is an art and good cooks are artists. For us science will have to do. I suggest a simple stew with whatever we have with grated coconut as thickener and salt and pepper as the masala. When we have vegetarian guests we will have only a vegetarian stew and we will boil eggs separately. Ashte! (That is it) as they say in Kannada. The artist cook among us will create her own menu.

Viju (taking out a book from the shelf): I will read out about how to make an Irish stew.

'George suggested that, with the vegetables and the remains of the cold beef and general odds and ends, we should make an Irish stew. It seemed a fascinating idea. George gathered wood and made a fire.'

We washed half-a-dozen or so potatoes, and put them in without peeling. We also put in a cabbage and about half a peck of peas. George stirred it all up, and then he said that there seemed to be a lot of room to spare, so we overhauled both the hampers, and picked out all the odds and ends and the remnants, and added them to the stew. There were half a pork pie and a bit of cold boiled bacon left, and we put them in. Then George found half a tin of potted salmon, and he emptied that into the pot.

He said that was the advantage of Irish stew: you got rid of such a lot of things. I fished out a couple of eggs that had got cracked, and put those in. George said they would thicken the gravy.

I forgot the other ingredients, but I know nothing was wasted; and I remember that, towards the end, Montmorency (the dog), who had evinced great interest in the proceedings throughout, trolled away with an earnest and thoughtful air, reappearing, a few minutes afterwards, with a dead water-rat in his mouth, which he evidently wished to present as his contribution to the dinner; whether in a sarcastic spirit, or with a genuine desire to assist, I cannot say.

It was a great success, that Irish stew. I don't think I ever enjoyed a meal more. There was something so fresh and piquant about it. One's palate gets so tired of the old hackneyed things: here was a dish with a new flavour, with a taste like nothing else on earth.

*And it was nourishing, too. As George said, there was good stuff in it. The peas and potatoes might have been a bit softer, but we all had good teeth, so that did not matter much: and as for the gravy, it was a poem—a little too rich, perhaps, for a weak stomach, but nutritious.'*³

Hope : Great! The Irish stew is an idiot-proof dish.

Shree : I agree, but we should have some dry dishes too.

Viju : I used to dump, potatoes, sweet potatoes and eggs in a brown envelope in the solar cooker and they used to cook well. Take them out, peel them, sprinkle salt and pepper and there! You have a dish!

Hope : We should fry tender vegetables as they would get too soft in the stew and we won't even know that they are there.

Shree : And we will have black tea, coffee and fruits to go with the meal.

Everybody : Wow! Three cheers!

Viju : We will christen it as 'The Hope Rainbow-Sangatya Perfect Health Diet'.

Shree : Now we should figure out how we are going to get more members of the commune.

Viju : We should begin with improving the spiritual tone of the place.

Hope : And what is that?

Viju : Have more spirits, more alcohol in our diet!

Shree : How are we going to produce on our own farm? Who will do it?

Viju : I will get Sajai. He is the author of ‘The Hitch Hikers’ Guide to Home Brewing in India’ Here is a book review:

Why should anti imperialism be so stark and without fun?

Sajai Jose

Sajai gives the answer eloquently in his underground publication – ‘The Hitch Hikers’ Guide to Home Brew in India. Fight capitalism and imperialism by boycotting the capitalist brew. ‘Abolish capitalist brew – Let Home Brew flourish’ is the slogan Sajai recommends to all communists, patriots, localists, greens, ecologists, Peak Oil wallahs and what have you.

The book is the first comprehensive account of home brew in India. Home brew of course includes local brew. The book divides India into 65 ecological regions, each having a special flavour! The book is strongest in covering Kerala and South India and weakest in covering North East India. The NE is a whole sub continent in itself – each valley having a special brew following the law – the larger the bio diversity the larger the variety of brew.

The book gives at least one address in each of the 600 odd districts in India where one can locate a home/local brew source. There are apprentice courses available in select place where one can learn the art in three months.

Home brew is highly seasonal but India is a large sub continent and one can hitch hike throughout one’s life learning and absorbing the local culture and brew in good healthy weather. In hot summers one can lie in a shade full of rice beer or on a winter night be wrapped in warm clothes full of hot toddy.

Inquilab Zindabad! Long Live Bewda India!

Shree : I hope he is not going to start a Nakre branch of Bewda India! But more than that I hope there are more people like him who have worked on identifying various edible plants, trees and a recipe book for these for every ecological region. A good guide for mushrooms and how to cook them is badly needed. Viju will agree to this only when we say that there should be another book

on how to hunt/catch snails, frogs, squirrels, quails and other small livestock and cook various delicacies.

Hope : That means a book on how to make different types of traps. Earlier, all this knowledge was oral. Now we need good source books from how to identify different plants to 'how to' on all survival issues. While we have paper we can print them and preserve one copy at every block level.

Viju : Look all this is a lot of fun. Actually Sajai is quite serious. He is a good journalist, expert on Peak Oil and runs the website www.peakoilindia.org and is extremely well read on our concerns. Yes, we should have one such person for all the fields that will become essential for the survival of human beings.

Shree : But he can't be a whole time distiller here!

Viju : No. I think we should get a room on the road as Sangatya office, have a land line phone and a broadband connection. He can do his online jobs for a few hours whenever he feels like. He can earn enough to pay the rent and phone charges and his other needs. Rest of the time he will be part of the commune and build up his brewing and distillery equipment and we will have a few bottles.

Shree : Ok. What next?

Viju : Next is the other most neglected area of our work. Poultry, fishery and piggery.

Shree : Who do you have in mind?

Viju : Nyla Coelho. She has been seeing pig slaughtering festivals since her childhood. A pig can weigh form 25 to 50 kg or even more. A good slaughter can feed all our Christian neighbours and build good relations. Nyla will build a piggery and run a poultry farm. When our pond is functional we will also have a lot of fish. Nyla is a Catholic Konkani Kamat! Triple Ks as they are called. They combine all the virtues!

Shree : We are managing fruit and vegetables but we can do with more help. Anyone else?

Viju : Well Usha Rao fills the bill. She is good in all this with ten years of experience in tough conditions. Here it is a cake walk.

Hope : Viju, what will you do?

Viju (abashed): Welllll...! I will read, tell stories, write stories, publish books, keep accounts and get them audited. I will run our film club and will manage our seed bank. And ...er...may be keeping the bar...

(Laughter)

Shree : That is great. Let us drink a toast to it!

References

1. People find it difficult to believe it, but Hope Rainbow is a real name of a young woman from USA who came to Sangatya for a few months.
2. 'The True Story of the Enslavement of Man' in 'An Intelligent Bird's Guide to the Birdwatcher and Other Stories' by T. Vijayendra, 2014 (2nd Edition), Sangatya Sahitya Bhandar, Nakre.
3. Chapter fourteen in Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog), by Jerome K. Jerome, 1889.

March 31, 2014



THE NITROGEN FOOT PRINT CALCULATOR

For Chetana, Karnika, Soujanya and Sagar

Chetana, Karnika and Soujanya burst into the office of Cerana Foundation. They had gone to Bilgram to attend the Environment Day and run a programme on Carbon Foot Print Calculator.

Viju asked them how the programme had been. Soujanya said, ‘Oh! It was great fun. There were a lot of young boys trying to make friends with us. We decided to change our names. I became Lavanya, Karnika became Katyayani and Chetana became Chandrika!

Karnika : We even changed the name of Cerana Foundation. We called it Apis Foundation!

Viju : Well, how did the Carbon Foot Print Calculator programme go?

Chetana : It was a great success. As usual people began to worry about how much they were contributing to the global warming and how much they could reduce.

Viju : So, you are happy about the programme.

All three : Nooo!

Viju : What happened?

Chetana : There was this horrible villager who spoilt it all in the end.

Viju : What did he do?

Karnika : Wait. I have taken notes. I will read it out to you.

"Before closing Nora said, 'among the guests today we have our friends from the villages who have been providing us organic food. I would ask Shree Keshav to give us feedback and tell us what we city people can give to the villages.'

Keshav said, 'I am grateful to Nora Akka for inviting me. I am very happy to be here among all you city folks. I have spent the whole day very happily watching all these clean and bright young people who are so concerned about the environment and village people.'

'I am very happy to see that our organic products are so popular among you. I heard about fair trade and that you people want to pay us good prices for our healthy organic products. Well that is nice. We can provide you as much organic products as you like.'

'Nora Akka asked me what the city people can give to help the villagers.'

'Today I looked around and tried to find what I can take it back from here. I found there is nothing. I began thinking what you people have that we may take. I find that you have something which is very valuable to us – almost as valuable as gold if not more. I am referring to what your school children call number one and number two (laughter). Why don't you send it to us? It is more valuable than the money that you promise as fair trade.'

'These bright young women from Hyderabad can tell us how many thousand litres of urine (piss) and how many tons of human excreta (shit) you people produce every day. Our village has only thousand people whereas you have a hundred thousand people. So you people produce a hundred times more this valuable

source of fertiliser. But you city people do not recognise it. Almost all of it is wasted and goes down expensive drains to pollute rivers and lakes and surrounding regions.'

'I also noticed that in the city you people burn leaf fall in the gardens. Then there is a lot of biodegradable waste that is put in plastic bags and allowed to rot. Now all that you have to do is to mix this biomass and your shit and piss and turn it into first class manure. Can you do it? This is the only thing that you city people can give to us villagers in return for the food we produce for you. Thank you.'

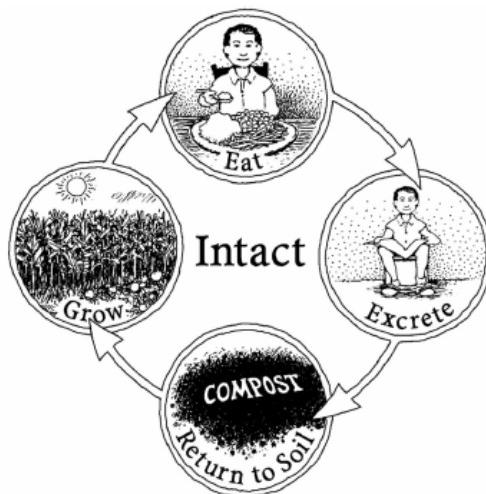
Viju : What was the reaction in the audience?

Soujanya : There was a hushed silence. Everybody seemed to be thinking about it. Then Nora thanked everybody and the meeting broke up.

Viju : Then what happened?

Chetana : The local people knew Keshav well and so they surrounded him and were chatting with him. We were feeling a bit isolated and feeling glum. He literally had poured shit and piss

THE HUMAN NUTRIENT CYCLE



on our Carbon Foot Print Calculator.

Karnika : After some time Keshav came over to us. He said, 'I know you are feeling bad. I am sorry. But do think over what I said and may be you will come up with a solution. You people are young and intelligent and have the right attitude. If you don't come out with a solution, then who will?'

Viju : So, have you got an answer?

Soujanya : No. That is why we are here, to discuss with you.

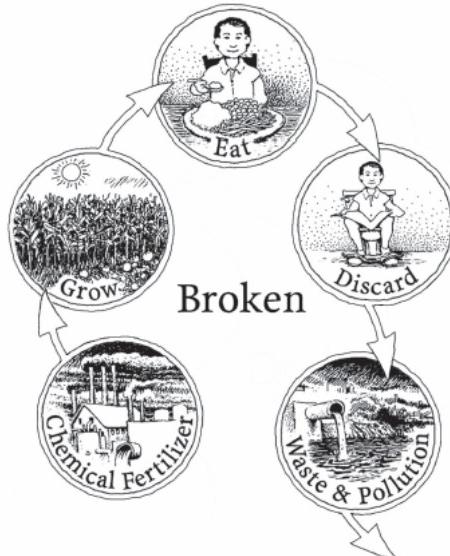
Viju : What do you think? Does he have a point?

Chetana : Yes he is right, but what can we do?

Viju : First let us try to understand what he means. We should get our quants man in it. (Calling) Sagar! Can you join us?

Sagar comes over and Viju explains to him about what happened at Bilgram. Sagar also reads Karnika's notes.

Sagar : Well, to begin with Keshav has given you a specific task '*These bright young women from Hyderabad can tell us how many thousand litres of urine (piss) and how many tons of human*



excreta (shit) you people produce every day.' So how much shit and piss a person produces per day on an average?

Soujanya : Well, taking piss and shit together roughly 500 cc and if one can assume a specific gravity of one, 500 grams.

Sagar : And how much bio mass is required to produce compost?

Karnika : Venkat's book 'On Composting' says four times.

Sagar : So we can produce 2.5 kilogram of compost per day.

Viju : We should take into account of losses due to evaporation, reduction of volume and weight in the process. I will say two kilogram is a reasonable figure. I will call up Suresh and check it.

Chetana : So in a year it will be 730 kilograms!

Sagar : Let us be conservative and make it 500 kilogram or half a ton. Now India has an urban population of 300 million and of which 180 million live in cities with population of more than one million. Now all the urban people do not use flush toilet. Many in small town defecate in open areas and so partly it goes back to land. Again to be conservative, let us assume only 100 million people's piss and shit does not go back to land and needs to be composted.

Soujanya : That gives us 50 million tons of compost. Wow!

Viju : Or in other words we are denying 50 million tons of organic fertilisers to the soil. Or as Albert Howard calls it we are denying 50 million tons of Manurial Rights of the soil! And if everyone in the country does scientific composting we will have 500 million tons of organic fertiliser!

Chetana : So half a ton of organic fertiliser is the Nitrogen Foot Print of Man in India!

Soujanya : Voila! We have designed a Nitrogen Foot print Calculator in a jiffy! Sagar, you are a genius!

Karnika : So each 'modern', 'civilised' and 'metropolitan' urban person has a Nitrogen Foot Print of half a ton per year. Of course it will vary from person to person and with age group, but the

order of magnitude will remain same.

Sagar : Quite right. However, calling it Nitrogen Foot Print is not quite accurate. There is another Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator around for the last few years which is actually quite different.

Viju : Don't be a spoil sport. No one knows about it. We will call our Calculator as the Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator.

Chetana : I will go back to Bilgram and carry out India's first Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator workshop and invite Keshav to it. So there!

Next day Chetana came again and met Viju.

Chetana : I thought a lot about our Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator. It is a great idea and like our Carbon Foot Print Calculator, every student should know about it. Even primary school children. In fact they will enjoy it a lot if we call it Number One and Number Two Foot Print Calculator.

Viju : Great. Go ahead and design the workshop and let us carry a pilot workshop in our office.

Chetana : I have thought of that. What worries me is the larger picture. How will we show how it affects all of us in many ways?

Viju : We begin with the Nitrogen cycle. We eat food, the waste products go back to the soil, get composted and the Nitrogen is restored or 'fixed' into the plants. Now a city breaks the Nitrogen cycle into half. It does not allow it to complete. The waste products do not go back to the soil. In a way it is the definition of a city. As Keshav put it:

But you city people do not recognise it. Almost all of it is wasted and goes down expensive drains to pollute rivers and lakes and surrounding regions.'

Chetana : There are two additional points here: expensive and pollution.

Viju : Quite right. There is the cost of water to flush, the cost of

pipes to carry the waste and in some cases the cost of treatment plant. However in many cases it is just sent to land fill or worse drained into rivers and lakes. This carries the additional risk of water borne diseases and its cost in treatment and man hours lost due to illness.

Chetana : My God! This is a horror story! But can the city actually do composting?

Viju : Not the way it is structured today. Also the attitude of urban people, who in general treat Nature and any living thing as enemy, is not helpful. They will always talk of bacteria that will make them ill. So demanding composting is part of a demand to change the attitude of city people towards living things, towards cats, dogs, crows, pigeons, sparrows, ants, bacteria and so on.

Chetana : Exactly what I think! So what is the larger picture?

Viju : For more than a century there have been reform movements for a greener city. Peter Hall's 'Cities of Tomorrow' is a good text book to get this history. We have to move towards smaller and greener cities. The gap between cities and villages has to be narrowed - something like the way it is in Kerala, Coastal Karnataka and Goa.

Chetana : And in the meanwhile? What can we do immediately?

Viju : We can certainly start with urban composting, urban kitchen gardens, urban solid waste management projects, tree planting in the city and making better city gardens.

Chetana : Coming back to our workshop, if they ask, 'Fine. We agree but what can we do? How can we compost our waste products in a city? I live in a flat. What can I do?'

Viju : A practical answer is to start composting our garden waste and animal waste in the city. However, there are also solutions of composting human waste products in any situation.

Chetana : Really! Where can one find them?

Viju : The principle of safe disposal of human excreta is to dispose

it as near the point of production and as soon as possible. The best method is composting latrines. In India we have the Sulabh Shouchalaya Programme. These people can build composting latrines in a large number of situations, particularly in urban slums. And they have actually built thousands of them, and as you can guess, mainly among poor and lower middle class household in smaller towns.

Chetana : How about multi storied flats?

Viju : The solution is what we do when someone is very ill and can't walk to the toilet. We have toilet chair seats that can be put anywhere and safe containers to carry the shit and piss to the toilet. Now if you are already doing some composting then it is easy to convert it to handle human waste also. Then all we do is to carry the shit and piss to the compost heap. In fact there is a very nice Chinese toilet chair seat available in Hyderabad for about Rs. 700/- which is ideal for this purpose.

Chetana : But people will hesitate handling human waste.

Viju : Correct. That is where the attitude change comes in. There is a book by Joseph C. Jenkins called, 'The Humanure Handbook' which deals with the whole issue beautifully. That should be your Bible. Then you can answer all the questions.

Chetana : My God! What am I getting into? A new religion?

Viju : You will become famous as the Shit Woman of India!

Chetana, Karnika and Soujanya came to Cerana Office with a design of the Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator workshop.

The Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator

1. *The Nitrogen Cycle*
2. *The Manurial Rights of the Land*
3. *The City and the Nitrogen Cycle*
4. *The Evils of the Non Composting Flush Toilet*

(Waste of water, pollution, disease burden of water bourne diseases)

5. *The Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator*
6. *The Humanure Toilet*
7. *The urban attitude to living things*
8. *The Greening of the City*

Note: The accurate name of the calculator should be The Flush Toilet User's Shit and Piss Footprint.

Soujanya : You know I was taught all this in my second semester in France by an Italian professor who was very passionate about it.

Viju : I am sure he was called the shit man of Italy. There are such people all over the world who are very worked up on the issue. And now that you know the subject, why don't you write a booklet on these lines. We can use it in the workshop.

Soujanya : Aiyyo! Why did I open my big mouth! O. K. Surely I will do it but you will have to help me.

Viju : Fine. The dead line is one week for the first draft. Five thousand words.

Soujanya : Oh! No! What is the hurry?

Viju : Nora rang up last night. They too had a meeting and they are starting a Humanure Project in Kabir Nagar. Keshav is going to inaugurate it. They have invited all of you. I told her about your Nitrogen Foot Print Calculator. She was very excited about it and asked all of you to do a work shop on this occasion. That is the reason for the hurry for the booklet. It should be ready for the workshop. So there!

Easter, 2014



AFTER ALL IT'S ONLY HIM

For Nyla Coelho

Nora Carvalho lived alone on No. 5, Cavalry Street, Bilgram Cantt. Bilgram is a picturesque small cantonment town in north Karnataka dating from Mutiny days and has been famous for training mounted army and police. Cavalry Road is the down town. Once it specialized in leather goods for the cavalry, but now it has everything. The road has a number of tailoring and shoe shops, banks, wine shop, sweet shop, eating places, take-aways, chemists, doctors, architects, cycle and bike repair shops and banks. In the by-lanes there are beef shops, kebab corner and vegetable markets. In another lane you have Gomez's piggery, which also sells bacon and sausages. In a small back yard he has a small bone mill which can take beef and pig bones. Here everybody in town comes, to buy, to bank or just to loiter.

Nora has lived at No. 5 on and off for more than 30 years. Everybody in the street knows her and her son, who is all of 20 years and is studying in Bangalore. Her elder brother Tony, also lives about a kilometre away with his family and visits her once in a while.

Nora has been active in environment causes. And since she lives alone her house was a 'natural' place for meetings. And that

bugged her no end. Even worse, her house was bang opposite the Overseas Bank and many people who knew her or her brother or her son or even her dead parents would just drop in to say hello. People who put in a cheque and got a token from the bank, would cross the street to ‘kill the time’ while their cheque was being processed. Mothers or fathers bringing their child back from the school would drop in and tell the child to say hello to Nora Auntie. Auntie indeed! Nora would mutter *sotto voce* and smilingly offer *chakli* to the child who would promptly spread the crumbs all over. And so on and on. All this not only bugged her but her work schedule would go completely haywire. But what set Nora really aflame when some of them dropping at very odd hours and would say, ‘We thought you wouldn’t mind. After all it is only us’!

Nora was considered safe. Mother of a boy of 20, protected by neighbours and a brother, men felt safe to drop in on her at any time of the day and even late at night. That again bugged her. Safe my foot! I’ll show them. And so she did!

One late evening, in fact it was at 11 pm, when the street was quiet, all doors closed and the dog had gone to sleep in the ATM booth across, there was a knock. Who’s there? It is me Susheel!. Reluctantly she opened the door. This guy, all grinning said, ‘I know it is late but I thought you wouldn’t mind. After all it is only me. And look what I got! Hot mutton Biryani from Niaz and a bottle of ...you would never guess...single malt scotch whiskey!’

Nora was boiling. With great difficulty she controlled her voice and said that she had already eaten and that she was in no mood to drink. And she went back to sleep after throwing in a sleeping bag in the other room.

She woke with the sound of loud snoring. This guy who had done justice to Niaz and Scotland was sprawled on a chair with his mouth open. She shook him. Nothing doing. She saw the whiskey bottle. She thought, “I will knock him on the head with his own bottle”. The knock stopped his snoring. She was pleased that the sturdy bottle did not shatter. Because if she hated one

thing more than sweeping and swabbing, it was to pick up shreds of shattered glass.

She suddenly became aware of the silence. First it pleased her. But there was a quality to this silence. She looked at this guy. He seems to be peacefully asleep. Too peaceful!?

Nora had been reading crime fiction recently. So she put a piece of paper against his nose. The paper did not move. Nora sat down and thought for a while. Slowly a plan emerged.

First thing, she reminded herself, 'No bloody mess on the dissection table' as Godbole Sir used to say. She took out her veterinary surgical kit (She had done M.Sc. Zoology and had volunteered for Blue Cross Society) and got her 500 cc syringe and a large needle. She removed his shirt, put the needle in his heart and slowly and methodically pumped 10 liters of blood out. She put them in one liter water bottles and added anticoagulant extracted from leeches of which she had a small bottle from one of the BNHS nature camps.

She laid the body out on the dining table. She took out her largest meat cleaver and 7 plastic bags. Head, arms (2), torso, thighs (2) and legs (2) all went neatly into the bags. Then she again took out the pieces one by one and removed the fleshy meat and put them all in one large bag. In another large bag went the bones. No blood, she noted with satisfaction. The clothes went into another bag. And the cash into her own pocket. The whole dissection took two hours. Exhausted she went back to sleep.

Next morning it was a Sunday. She put the whiskey bottle and the Niaz food packets in the garbage bag and took it to the bin in the next lane. Then she took out her scooter, loaded with one large bag and went to Ronnie's house. She knew Ronnie from her 'Friends of the Zoo' days. Ronnie bought meat for the wolves in the zoo and had a budget of Rs. 200/- per day. He tried to pay Nora but she waved it away saying, 'Ronnie you taught me so many things. But the most important thing I learnt was, when in trouble throw them to the wolves.'

She came back and took the next heavy bag to Gomez's

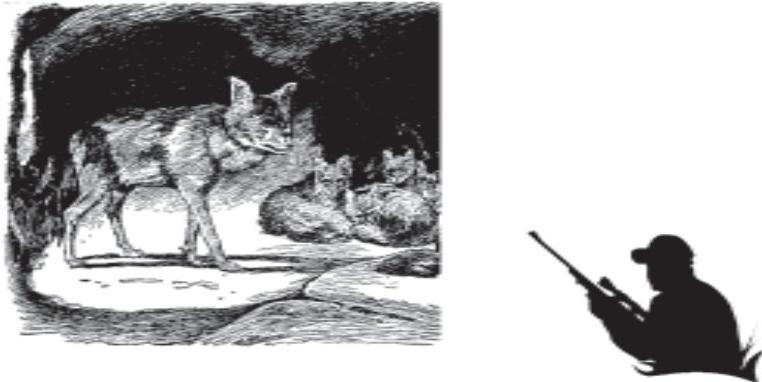
bone mill. Gomez was dead drunk but his nine year old son Peter was around. Showing off, he expertly emptied the bag into the mill and started the motor. In ten minutes she got back her bag full of crushed bones. Peter gleefully pocketed the ten rupee note and then winked at her conspiratorially!

She then moved on to her friend Nilu Deshpande's garden, where she had an 'allotment' of a vegetable patch. She usually worked there on Sunday mornings. She dug up a 3 feet by 6 feet bed and created an 'in situ' compost with the crushed bone, biomass and covered it with earth.

Nora came back all tired. She took a hot bath and got dressed for the noon mass. There was this collection of clothes for flood relief. She donated the bag of clothes.

She had to wait till evening for the last job. Like every Sunday she went to the Zoo Gardens, only this time she also carried a large bag. The Zoo Gardens has large sprawling forest. She took a long walk up to a secluded corner. The last of the birds were settling in and there was a hushed silence. She waited, looked up and suddenly she let out a piercing shrill and eerie call. The forest appeared stunned but there was smile on her face. Within no time a large group of black flying objects loomed in the sky. Silently and gracefully they came down and hung from the branches of the Peepal tree upside down. Nora took out plastic plates and poured out the blood from the bottles. Soon the dark creature silently came down and lapped up all the blood and vanished into the sky as silently as they came. Nora's master's thesis was on vampire bats.

The rest, as they say, is history. Her potatoes from the allotment won the first prize in the annual Bilgram Horticulture Show. She leased in another acre of plot to multiply, retaining the original seed bed. Her Susheel Brand Couch Potato Fries fetch premier prices. They have also received the 100% organic product certificate from OFAI (Organic Farmers Association of India). She has sent her son to England to do a M.Sc. in environment sciences. She does not mind raking in all the money that keeps coming every day. After all it is only him!



THROW THEM TO THE WOLVES

For Manu K.

It was Johnny Appleseed Day. As you all know Johnny Appleseed went around barefoot all over America planting apple seeds and made friends with all sorts of wild animals including a wolf. Nora was thinking of him on her way to the Bilgram Reserve Forest where she was an honorary forest warden and also studied wolves.

Nora first got the faint smell of smoke and there was a quiet rage in her heart. How dare they? And this in her own Bilgram Reserve Forest! Nora was on her way to the wolf watch where she studied wolves regularly. She carried some beef pieces from the butcher shop to feed the wolves. The smoke signified that a poacher had a lit a fire in front of the cave and was waiting for the wolves to come out with his gun ready to shoot.

Nora knew what to do. She became impatiently patient. She dropped all her bags slowly and took out her catapult and choice round pebbles from the Chinnaprabha River. She was an expert at hitting non moving targets from her childhood hitting mangoes hanging from the branches.

Nora moved cautiously and turned round the big rock from

where she usually watched the wolves. Well there is no target as unmoving as a man with a gun aiming at the mouth of the cave. There was not a second to lose. Nora aimed carefully at his temple and ping! He was down with his rifle thrown out of his hand. Nora moved fast and without a glance at the man picked up his rifle and hastily scattered the fire. She could see the bright eyes of the wolves peering from inside the cave.

With a sigh of relief she turned round to the man. He lay unmoving. Nora put a blade of grass under his nose. The blade did not move. He was dead. Nora was quite unperturbed. The man was going to kill!

She undressed him and threw the body to the wolves. They were quite used to Nora bring pieces of meat for them. This was a bonanza. They happily set about the task.

Nora bundled up the clothes and went to Chinnaprabha falls. She took out her pocket knife and carefully shredded every piece of cloth and threw them down the fall. She found some money in his purse which she pocketed, shredded all pieces of paper and threw them down into the gushing waters.

It was evening and there was a rainbow in the sky. Nora imagined climbing the rainbow with the wolf family in a row behind her on the way to the heaven.



FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

For Ajay Sriram

On Saturday Nora got a call from the Hospice centre. Bertha Cascellino was asking for her. Normally Nora went on Tuesdays and Fridays and that too only on night duties.

The Everest Resort for Pain and Palliative Care also worked as Hospice (centre for care of terminally ill persons). Her friends were always making fun of the word 'Everest' – ever-rest or rest forever!

It was situated on the outskirts of Bilgram and was close to the Bilgram Reserve Forest. Nora found it convenient to visit it on her way back from the forest.

The Everest Resort was headed by Sr. Cecilia. She was a graduate in Holistic Health from the Medical Mission Sisters. She was also a competent nurse and a good administrator. Gloria, Julia and Josephine helped with various tasks – from cleaning to cooking. Aunt Susan, a buxom old lady was the matron. John Pinto and his dog Ronny looked after the garden and security. They moved about and were generally liked by everyone.

They had a consultant physician - Dr. Akshay who had

recently come back from the U.S.A. with all sorts of degrees in pain and palliative care. He also had a huge education loan, nearly thirty lakh rupees, to pay back. He had long hair, ear rings and was more interested in working as a D. J. in Bilgram Club than working at the Resort.

The Everest Resort had two sections and two kinds of patients. The first kinds were those who were rich and had all sorts of pain due to their life style. They were given a course in Basic Holistic Health and had good healthy food, yoga, walks in the forest, work in the Resort garden and went to listen to Music at the Bilgram Club. They lived in the section usually referred to as the Resort.

The Resort had an equitable scheme for the fees. Patients were charged according to their income. If a person earned Rs.1000/- per day then he would be charged the same amount per day at the Resort. Most patients approved of the scheme and happily paid. Some of them even paid a higher rate. It gave a good income to the resort. Many patients came again and again.

The other kind was the hospice ward. It had only six beds. Here people were admitted who were terminally ill. There was no hope for them to recover. They came here to die peacefully in company of spiritual people.

The hospice had a good reputation as most patients were happy that they had an assured painless future. Their relatives were also happy as they were relieved of the daily burden. Some of them visited regularly, others sent card and gifts to the Resort. Sometimes this included a gift cheque too! The fee principle was same. In addition the patients and their relatives were encouraged to mention the Resort in their will. Even if it was not mentioned in the will many relatives made generous donation to the Resort after the death of their old relative at the hospice.

Nora was very popular among all the patients of the Everest Resort because of her knowledge of forest, environment and nature. Nora took the sessions on Environment Awareness in Basic Holistic

Health Course and led them to forest walks. She taught them that reconnecting with nature has a therapeutic role. She encouraged them to work at the garden with John's help and do some home gardening when they went back. She had a tremendous sense of humour and laughed easily at the jokes people tell her. Her patients looked forward to her visits.

Nora had also acquired some professional skills in the field. She has attended a short term course on Geriatric Care run by Hospice India. She had also attended a one month course in Pain and Palliative Care which was run jointly by the Indian and International Association of Pain and Palliative Care.

Nora visited the forest one hour before dawn and came back one hour after the sunrise. On her way back she would visit the Resort and have her breakfast with the inmates. Between 9 and 11 she was available for counseling in her office. In the evening also she went to the forest an hour before sunset and returned an hour after. In the evening after dinner she did night duty at the hospice ward. Nora charged for her counseling sessions on the same general principle but she did free voluntary service for the night shift. So although she worked only twice a week she had a good income because many patients liked her and would prolong their sessions with her.

Nora lived upstairs at No. 5 Cavalry Road, house owned by Bertha Cascellino. Nora's main worry was where to go after Aunt Bertha died. Here she was paying only Rs. 300 as rent whereas a new place would cost her at least Rs. 3000! Secondly her son, Michael was finishing his M.Sc. in Environment Sciences in Bangalore and wanted to go abroad for further studies. She was unhappy about her response that she cannot afford it.

Dr. Akshay normally woke up around noon as he spent late hours at the Bilgram Club and later with his music. He made a pot of black coffee and leisurely got ready and made himself a brunch – a rich omelette with tomatoes, capsicum, mushroom and cheese.

He had it with brown bread washing it down with several cups of black coffee.

He reached the Resort at 4 pm and had a counseling session between 4 to 6 pm. He charged same as Nora following the same principle. Since he worked daily he too had a reasonable packet. Then he did a round of the hospice ward. The old people eagerly awaited to tell him about their aches and pains, about their bowel movement and about their sleep. He smiled, laughed, patted and changed medicine – mainly sleeping pills and pain killers. Then he had a small session with the Sr. Cecilia, reviewing all the cases. Most of the times these sessions were not really necessary since the treatment was fairly straight forward. Although the visiting hours were from 4 to 6 pm some outstation visitor will turn up at any hour, profusely apologising but nevertheless talking to Sr. Cecilia. So often these sessions did not occur. Then he walked to the Bilgram Club around seven.

Akshay was respected and liked both by the staff and patients for his knowledge and forthrightness. To the new comers at the Resort he would say, 'If you have come here for cure of specific diseases, longevity or increase in your sexual performance then you have come to a wrong address. Here we help you to lead a healthy life, to remain healthy as long as you live. 'Add Life to your Years and not Years to your Life'!

To the relatives of people who were brought to the hospice centre, he would say, 'Our aim here is to reduce suffering and not prolong death. We help our patients to die in peace and tranquilly without suffering unnecessarily. Our guiding principle is 'Do not do any medical intervention that does not improve the quality of life of the patient' and our motto is 'Live Well and Leave Well'!

His knowledge of music was a tremendous asset. He could find any music that the patients wanted and copy them to their iPods. He also found some of his patients were remarkably knowledgeable in old music and he learnt a lot from them. He also explored the therapeutic role of music in pain and palliative care.

The hospice ward was not one big hall. The building had eight small rooms, two on each side of a square with a nice little square lawn in the middle. One of the front two rooms was Sr. Cecilia's office and the other was Nurse's room.

The patients lived in separate rooms each with an attached bath and toilet. They were allowed to bring couple of pieces of their personal furniture – usually a cupboard which contained fancy items they treasured and an easy chair. Often an extra chair would end up in the verandah which was in front of the room and went all round the square. In winter the chairs moved to the lawn.

Bertha Cascellino was eighty four. Frail, weak and with lots of aches and pains; but still she had a lot of life and fun. She owned No. 5 Cavalry Street in Bilgram. It was a colonial structure and one of the last few left in Bilgram. Cavalry Street was seeing regular demolition of old buildings and new shiny glass and metal structures coming up.

Widow of Colonel Cascellino, Bertha was quite rich. She had two sons and a daughter. The eldest son lived in Mangalore, the other in Dubai and the daughter in the U. S. All of them were well settled and fairly rich. They managed to visit the mother once a year and brought lot of gifts, most of which went to the hospice. They also paid up dues regularly and every year gave a gift cheque.

Bertha had Nora's family as tenants for decades. Now Nora's parents were dead and the brothers have moved out but Nora stayed on. Nora often dropped in for a few minutes to say hello to Bertha Aunty on her way back. And Bertha loved Nora and always offered food and drink. Once in a while Nora shared a glass of wine in the evening with her.

So when Bertha turned eighty she said enough is enough and moved to the hospice. She locked up the house and gave her keys to Nora. She moved only her bar and an easy chair to the hospice. Colonel Cascellino maintained and excellent bar and Bertha Aunty also kept on replacing the bottles. She used to call

the manager of the bank across the street offer him a glass of sherry and conduct her banking business with him. The manager, Cecil Alvarez was always happy for this distraction and they discussed Goa and food and drinks. When she moved to the hospice she still called him and still shared a glass of sherry. And like in the past she shared a glass of wine with Nora.

Saturday was always busy at the Resort. New groups arrived in the morning and visitors to the hospice often came on Saturdays. Today Bertha had also called her banker and he had arrive with a large Manila envelope and left after a chat and his usual glass of sherry.

Dr. Akshay also had a busy schedule because Saturday evenings at the Club was always demanding. He finished his counseling sessions and went on his round to the hospice. Aunt Bertha welcomed him but complained of lack of sleep. Akshay said O.K. He will change her medicine but on one condition. She should not have a drink. Bertha said fine and poured the Sherry only for him. Akshay said ‘Good girl’ patted her on her cheek and was off. He peeped in at Sr. Cecilia room and saw she had visitors so he said ‘Bye! I will see you on Monday’.

So in the evening when Nora got her call she agreed to drop in. Bertha Aunty welcomed her said she had a lot to tell her and Sr. Cecilia. She said, ‘Nora dear! I don’t have long to live. So today I called Cecil from the bank and arranged everything. In the Manila envelope there are packets for you, Akshay, Cecilia, Gloria, Julia, Josephine, Aunt Susan and John Pinto. There is also something in my will for you. Changing the will may take too much time so I want to tell you that share it with Akshay. The boy has been very good to me and he has his loan to pay. I think you will be able to pay it off’. Nora a got bit alarmed and called Sr. Cecilia. Cecilia said don’t worry she told me all this several times. She is very fond of you and she feels that she must do something for Akshay. Bertha gave the envelope to Cecilia for safe keeping in the office safe.

Cecilia came back after locking the safe. Then Bertha said, 'And now let us have a party!' And as if on cue a tempo trolley stopped outside and in walked a couple of bearers from the Bilgram Club carrying white boxes of food. It was mainly things to go with a party – prawns, fish tikka, small sausages, chicken manchuria, gobi manchuria, cheese dip and bread sticks and so on. Bertha said that they can have all the drinks in the wine cup board. Nora and Bertha stuck to some old French wine. The girls polished off red wine bottles, John and Susan went for whisky whereas Cecilia was happy with her gin and lime. They played some music and sang. John did some pantomime of some of the rich visitors of the Resort. Nora told jokes. There was much laughter. Ronny wanted to be part of everything and cats were prowling for tit bits. Everybody had a good time.

The party ended as all god things must do. Nora prepared her pillow on the easy chair and brought out a volume of Proust's *la recherche du temps perdu* ('In Search of Lost Time'). The hospice went quite as night descended. The Resort people were returning from the Bilgram Club. There was a crescent of moon.

Nora woke around two in the morning. Aunty Bertha appeared to be sleeping quietly. Nora got up, stretched and decided to cover the Aunty properly. She went close and something alarmed her. She touched her hand and face. It was cold. Bertha had silently died. Nora came out and slowly walked towards Cecilia's room. A lamp came up in her room and Cecilia whispered, 'what is it Nora?' 'Bertha is gone' Nora whispered back with a choke in her voice. Cecilia came out with a shawl on her shoulder and said, 'I will join you in the wake'.

Next morning they called up the son in Mangalore and fixed up the funeral for next Sunday by which time the other brother and sister will be able to reach. They ordered the portable refrigerated hearse in which the body can be preserved. They waited till four before calling up Dr. Akshay because they thought he would be sleeping late.

After several rings Akshay replied. Nora asked, “can you come to the hospice?”

‘What is up? I am in Bangalore. My friend from Australia has come and so I took the night bus.’

‘Bertha Aunty passed away early this morning. She sort of knew it was coming and she prepared for it. Her banker had come during the day. And in the night she especially called me and told Cecilia and me about her last wishes. Then we had a party and we almost finished her bar! (laughs). Bertha had several glasses of her best white wine.’

There was a prolonged silence on the line.

‘Are you still there?’

‘Yes! I am surprised and not surprised. Anyway she went happily’.

‘That is what I keep on telling myself. But I can’t keep my tears back. She has been like a mother to me for the last so many years’.

‘I too am feeling sad. Take care. I will come back in a day or two.’

‘You can take your time. The funeral is on Sunday’

It was a very beautiful funeral. Bertha was popular and so many old people came from all over the town, some even speaking Portuguese! The lawyer read the will on Monday at the hospice. The whole family and Nora and Cecilia were present. It said, ‘I have only one property, the house at No. 5 cavalry Road. My children are well settled and are generous of heart. For nearly 30 years I have treated Nora as my daughter and she has reciprocated the feeling. So I give my house and all its contents to Nora. My children, however, are welcome to pick up any memento from the house.’

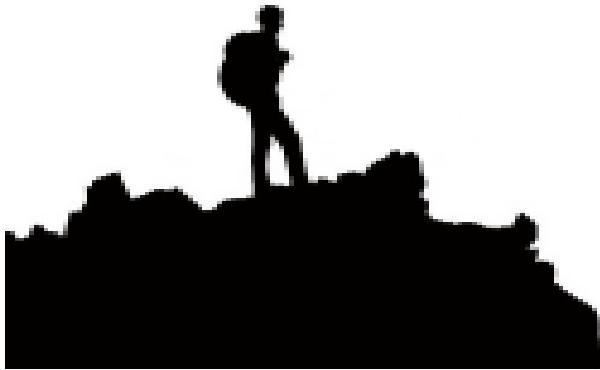
Every one applauded. Nora looked apprehensively at the

family. They were all beaming and came and hugged Nora. They said, 'We are so glad that Mum did what she did. We all wanted to help you but thought you would be offended.' Nora could not stop bawling. Every one soothed her saying, 'Now! Now! You should be happy. All your financial worries are over!'

Nora sold the house for rupees one crore since it was prime property. She gave 33 lakhs to Akshay. Akshay was reluctant to take it but Cecilia prevailed upon him saying that she herself was present when Bertha expressed her wish to pay off his educational loans. Nora sent her own son to England to do a doctoral course in environment sciences. With the remaining money she bought a nice property between the forest and the hospice.

October, 2, 2011





THE BLACK HOLE

For Artur Bakaev

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem that is suicide. Judging whether life is worth living or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.

*Albert Camus
The Myth of Sisyphus*

Artur Bakaev was travelling in the West Himalayas in Nepal. He had heard of an area called 'The Black Hole' and the legend that no one returns alive from it. He was curious and as the saying goes, curiosity killed the cat.

Asking every where he finally reached a small hamlet called Posung and there he was. Yes, The Black Hole does exist and it is across the river but no one from the village was prepared to take him there. When asked if any one before him had come, they readily answered, yes, yes, several white men had gone there but no one returned.

Artur was reading Camus and said to himself, what the hell! I might as well find out if life is worth living or not. So he took a small boat and crossed the river. The villagers told him where to

start and where best to land. He found a small foot path leading up the hills. With his heart in his hand he slowly proceeded. It was a sort of lane which twisted and turned every few hundred meters with bushes all around. Squirrels were running up and down and he heard many birds chirping and even saw a few of them. A hare ran across the field.

Then he heard a whistle and a man jumped down from a tree with binoculars in his hands. He was dressed for moving about in the forest, with dull coloured clothes and good hiking shoes. He said, 'Welcome to The Black Hole! Follow me.'

They walked through the forest and reached a village square. It had two bungalow kind of buildings with sign boards. One read 'The Last Fling' and the other 'Ever Rest'. There was also a pub on one side called 'The Watering Hole'. His host took him there and ordered cold beer. A lot of young European volunteers in farmer's clothes were also drinking beer and chatting away in several different languages. Artur was happy to see the German beer 'Augustina' on the menu and ordered and took a deep draught. Then the host said that his name was Gavriola, which is Russian for Gabriel, and asked Artur, 'Show me your papers and tell me a little about yourself'. After listening he said, 'Oh! You are a German Jew! I will call Hannah to take you around. Meanwhile, let me assure you, there is no danger and you can go back whenever you want.' Artur let out a huge sigh of relief and gulped the remaining beer.

Hannah turned up, a stunningly beautiful brunette in a long flowing maroon skirt and a fetching canary yellow top. After they were introduced, Gavriola said he had to go back to his post in the forest. Hannah said let us move to the lounge of Ever Rest, here it is too noisy.

The Ever Rest lounge was a bit dark with several alcoves and low comfortable sofas. There was a menu and key board on the coffee table. Hannah ordered another Augustina for him and an apple juice for herself by pressing the menu numbers on the key board. A waiter silently appeared and placed their order on

their table without uttering a word.

Hannah said, ‘You must be dying to ask some questions so go ahead. But be assured you won’t die without your wish.’

Artur’s first question was ‘Why do the villagers say that no one returns alive from here?’

Hannah smiled displaying white even teeth and said, ‘Always and always this is the first question. Yes, what the villagers say is true from their experience. But as Gavriola told you, you are free to leave any minute. Only you will not go back the same way. We take you through another route to another village at the other side of the valley.’

‘We do this to discourage people from visiting us out of sheer curiosity.’

‘But also some people actually do not return. They come here to die. We are the Federal Headquarters of the International Society for Euthanasia. Societies in member countries are our members and they annually contribute to the upkeep of this centre. However, it is also self sufficient in terms of food and energy and several volunteers work here. I am a volunteer.’

Why do you call this place ‘The Black Hole?’

‘The real name of our place is Free-Land. Here everything is free. You are free to stay or not to stay. There is no money. You can eat and drink whatever you like and as much as you like. However, once you decide to stay for a longer period you will get to know the basic discipline. We operate on the principle of ‘a free association of free people.’’

‘How do people wanting to commit euthanasia die here?’

‘When they come they are first put up in Ever Rest for as long as they like. The hotel has a big library on euthanasia and films and case studies of how people came to decide when and how - both here and elsewhere. They can also go back if they feel like. When they are ready they ask for a date.’

‘Then they are shifted to The Last Fling. Most people would already have planned their last fling. They have a host that they can choose from volunteers. A typical routine is that they want to see the Sunrise on the mountain in the East and the Sunset on the Western mountain. They have a dinner and music of their choice. The medicine is given in their food with their full consent but they won’t feel it.’

‘When they are ready to retire, the host takes them to their room and helps them to undress. Some like to be left alone whereas some want to die in the arms of their host. All their wishes are fulfilled.’

‘I have to go now. They will give you a room here for a day. Feel free to do anything you like – use the library, go for a walk, meet other guests. I will meet you tomorrow morning at 11. Guten tag!’

Artur went up to his room. There was a laundry basket which said that clothes will be returned by 7 pm and there was a pyjama suit and a track suit. He quickly got out of his clothes and put all his clothes in the laundry basket, had a bath, got into the pyjama suit and crawled between sheets.

He woke up refreshed around 1 pm, got into his track suit and went down to the lunch area. He heard someone speaking German and joined him for lunch. He stuck to his Augustina beer although a lot of choice was available. He had some fish, some white wine and apple pie and three varieties of cheese.

His companion was a portly looking ex banker with a walrus moustache. Over coffee he told his story of coming to the Free-Land. He was healthy but was quite old – 69 going on to 70, and wanted to die in good health. He had made a living will in which he expressed his desire not to be hospitalised if he fell ill. But that did not satisfy him so he made another document called ‘legal death’ on his 69th birthday. In this he settled all his affairs and converted a million DM in traveller’s cheque and left home. He

wandered around the world for nearly a year and finally came here to die. He wanted to die on his 70th birthday.

Then he asked Artur's story. Artur said he was a volunteer in India for a year and on his way back he was travelling in Nepal. In Germany he was with an anti nuclear organisation called Kurve Westrow. Herr Ackermann asked quite a lot about KW, its work, its funding etc. Then he looked embarrassed, coughed twice and asked if it was all right if he made a small donation to KW. He still had some left out of his million DM and he had very little time to spend and nowhere to spend. Of course all money left will go to Free-land. Artur said yes and thanked and asked how much he wished to give. He said a quarter of a million, that is 250,000 DM, is all he could spare because he did want to leave some money for Free-Land also.

After lunch Artur went for a long walk. He saw volunteers working in fields, shepherding mountain sheep, running poultry and piggeries. He went up the Western mountain to see the Sunset. On his way he saw micro hydel plants running and producing electricity. At the Sunset point there was a glass encased room, a few tables, with a carafe of red wine on each table and glasses. About 8 people were already there looking out at the Western sky. The Sun slowly turned into a huge orange and then into a red ball and slowly sunk down the mountains. Every one watched breathlessly. The red wine in the glass glowed!

Next morning Hannah was there in blue jeans, bottle green top and tough shoes. Over Augustina and apple juice she asked what he thought of the place. Artur said he was thrilled and told her the story of the donation to his organisation. Yes she had heard about it and she was happy that the money was going to good causes. Then Artur said that he would like to be a volunteer for a few months and would like to be a host for a Last Fling. She said 'you are welcome to be a volunteer but to be a host to the Last Fling will take some time. Usually the volunteers train for about 3

months before they are ready for it and the organisation is satisfied about them. Normally, they will have to stay in the volunteer's hostel but twice a week he can join for a meal at the Ever Rest for getting used to the ideas of euthanasia. He can use the library - both books and films as part of his training.'

The next three months were very busy for Artur. He worked for 5 days a week for half the day in various projects of Free-Land which made it self sufficient in food and energy. He also spent some time at the Kindergarten. Twice a week he spent studying euthanasia and interacting with people who were staying at Ever Rest and who in their own way were also studying euthanasia.

The three months flew by. He had come in January and now it was April. Then one day Ruth, one of the residents of Ever Rest asked him if he would be the host at her Last Fling on Good Friday! Artur was thrilled but he said he had to get the approval from Free-Land management. She said she had already asked them and they said it was all right.

Friday, the 13th April, 2012 remained etched in Artur's memory forever. Ruth was 55 years old and she had leukaemia or blood cancer. She was a biochemist and had held a professor's job at the Max Planck Institute. At the age of 50 when she discovered she had cancer she retired from her job on medical grounds and had a good pension.

Ruth was a German Jew of Russian origin. However, her parents had become Christians and she carried a multi religious, multi ethnic and multi lingual culture. She was active in peace movement, in anti nuclear movement and in Humanist Atheist movements. She was thus a curious mix of rationalism and rich cultural background.

Ruth had been staying longest at Ever Rest. Not because she had any misgivings about euthanasia. But all her actions were deliberate. She wanted to enjoy life as long as she could and then

decide to end it when it was not worth living any more. She chose her date and her host with care and had a reason for everything.

So on April 13, 2012, Artur was ready early morning in a track suit to accompany her to the Sunrise point on the Eastern Mountain. After the glorious sunrise they breakfasted on orange juice, black coffee and Russian black bread and some cheese.

She rested most of the day and had a frugal lunch with some fish soup and wafers and a pint of Augustina.

In the evening Artur was ready in a black suit to accompany her to the Sunset point in the Western Mountain. They remained seated quietly for nearly half an hour sipping red wine. They returned and after a small rest she went back to the dining room dressed in a fantastic black gown with white lace. Artur complimented her on her dress and as they marched down to the dining table the orchestra broke in with the Wedding March from Mid Summer's Night Dream by Mendelssohn. The menu was already chosen and consisted of:

Borsch

A plov with lypyoschka with red mellow wine

Trout Fish with white wine

Augustina

Salted cashew nuts

Seven kinds of cheese

Liqueur

Coffee

Ruth chatted pleasantly about her child hood in Russia and Russian Christmas when they went to the forest to cut down a Christmas tree and about her dog Ilyusha who followed her everywhere. Then she talked about her University days in Berlin, the protest marches against nuclear weapons and movements for peace and disarmament. She said she is dying happily because Fukushima occurred and now at least Germany won't have any nuclear plants. Then she talked about Free-Land and the self sufficient commune and about agro ecology.

She told him the story of Mendelssohn discovering the music scrolls of Passion by Johann Sebastian Bach in a butcher's shop and his subsequent struggle to perform it. How it was the German Jews, who rescued the greatest music of all time by the combined efforts of Mendelssohn, a Jewish banker and hundreds of musicians who practised the music in a barn away from the city without charging anything on Sundays. She explained her choice of music for the day. She chose the Wedding March because she was marrying Death. Then she chose Passion because it was Good Friday. Passion referred to the suffering of Jesus on the Cross.

As the dinner progressed the music switched over to pieces from Passion and then she continued it on a DVD in her room upstairs. Artur was enchanted and was moving as if in a dream. He woke up in her bed at 2 in the morning. It took some time to realise where he was and he thought why he woke. He became aware of a silence. There was no music and Ruth was not breathing. He dressed quietly and kept a wake till sunrise.

Artur found a packet waiting for him in his room. He tore it open and found five books with a note from Ruth saying that she always carried these books with her. The books were:

The Good Soldier Schweik by Jaroslav Hasek
To Kill a Mocking Bird by Harper Lee
Three Men in a Boat by Jerome K. Jerome
Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll
Walden by Henry D. Thoreau

March 28, 2012



THE TRUE STORY OF REGAINING PARADISE

Epilogue to the 2047 Edition

For Shreekumar

Now the story can be told. T. Vijayendra wrote the following in September 2013, a month before he died. He had left explicit instructions for the editors to open the sealed envelope only after Paradise had been regained. That is, when a world without fossil fuels; without armies; weapons and wars and a world without borders had been firmly established.

The role of Shreekumar and T. Vijayendra, to say nothing of Vinay Kumar's vital aural renditions as being catalytic to this revolution, is well known all over the world. This document tells why and how the collaboration came about.

Editors

T. Vijayendra wrote:

When I came to Bidar in the year 1990, my elder brother T. Raghavendra was in the U. S. He wrote to me, 'I am glad you are back in Karnataka. I can now pass on a family responsibility. Please visit Honnali at the earliest and read the family archives'.

The archives revealed that the history of the 'T' family dates back to 37 A.D. In the month of April that year, on a Saturday

night somewhere near Jerusalem, four bearded men in dark cloaks gathered around the cross to which Jesus of Nazareth was nailed. They were Peter, Paul, Matthew and Thomas. They swiftly pried the nails, brought the body down and fed Jesus drops of a specially medicated wine. They then moved to the shore carrying Jesus; gently lay him on the floor of a small boat, loaded it with the jar of wine, loaves of bread and a jar of water. Thomas climbed in; the others silently blessed him, made the sign of cross and vanished into the dark night.

Thomas rowed fast, as in the morning the ‘resurrection’ would be discovered and the ‘murderers’ would certainly commission a search. There was however no way of knowing the direction or the hour he had set sail.

This has been a guarded secret, passed on from one generation to the next for the past 2000 years!

Thomas sailed for weeks, feeding Jesus pieces of dark bread soaked in the medicated wine. He himself lived on water and an occasional fish. He reached the Malabar Coast and went straight to a merchant named Jakob Punnen. In the dead of night they moved Jesus in a bullock cart to a Keralite Ayurvedic medicine man. There for the next three weeks recovery progressed steadily, till his wounds healed and strength returned.

Still fearing pursuit, Thomas and Jesus moved northwards dressed as Indian mendicants. At a fishermen’s village in Udupi they parted company and Jesus stayed back. Soon his fame spread as a healer. He adopted a new name, Kitta – a common name of the region meaning small which sounded like Christ. He married, raised a family and died. People revered him as Kitta Swamy and built a temple in his name.

Thomas moved further north and reached an idyllic village – Honnali, on the banks of the river Tungabhadra. He became a priest, served in a small temple dedicated to Shree Hanuman; married, raised a family and died. There was but one difference. He wrote a diligent record in the local language and instructed

his son to make a copy before dying. Since then, the record has been copied and added on to by every successive generation. So our family is the descendent of Thomas.

I read this far and wrote to my brother, ‘Nice story. Do you wish me to edit and publish it?’ He wrote back: Hand on my heart! I just copied the record kept by our father and he is not the kind of person to pass on fiction. What is more, here in the USA a person named Dan Brown visited me and told me a similar story. He said, “I represent a secret society that was formed by St. Peter, mandated to save the descendent of Jesus, because the original ‘murderer’s’ descendent are still sworn to kill him. Also the Roman Catholic Church is against proving that Jesus escaped alive. He said to me, “You should keep the secret and locate the descendent of Jesus.”

Dan Brown added, ’the assassins are now ruling the world through the U. S., which in turn is being ruled by a few ultra rich Jew families of New York. They too are on the lookout for descendants of Jesus. But now the time is approaching when He (the descendent of Jesus) can come out to inspire the struggle against U S Imperialism. I am sure he is a male from the fisher folk community of Udupi.’ He picked up his hat and left saying, ‘You don’t have to reply. Do what you want to and can. I trust you to keep this meeting secret’.

My brother added, ‘You have not read Book Two of the archive yet. Please do it and you will get convinced.’

Book Two: ‘In 1498 the assassins sent an agent named Coelho on board the ship that sailed with Vasco de Gama to the Malabar. Another agent had gone with Columbus in 1492 to the New World. Coelho’s job was to trace the origin of Christianity in India particularly that of the Marthomite sect, locate the descendent of Jesus and execute him. However the society got wind of the project after it became clear that Columbus did not reach India. They sent St. Thomas Aquinas to India by the land route. He was helped by the Sufis all the way. He came to Honnali and met our ancestor Guracharya. He persuaded Guracharya to move to Udupi, change

his name to Madhvacharya and take over as priest of the Kittaswamy temple. The temple was changed to Udupi Krishna temple and Madhvacharya established himself as a new Acharya starting the Dvaita sampradaya. Needless to say, that this philosophy was the same as that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus all the traces of descendants of Jesus were wiped out. Guracharya had two sons - Jayateertha and Raghavendracharya. Raghavendracharya started a Matha in Honnali on the lines of Madhva's thoughts and it later came to be known as Raghavendra Swamy Matha. Jayateertha left home and became a sanyasi and a commentator of Madhva's works.'

I faithfully copied the record in my own handwriting and destroyed the original as per our family tradition and I thought that was the end of it. I still thought that it was a clever piece of fiction by my father, who was a scholar of the Madhva tradition and knew about the similarity between St. Thomas Aquinas and Madhva philosophy. But then there was the visit of Dan Brown to my brother. It was difficult to believe that my prosaic brother invented Dan Brown.

Then in 2001 Dan Brown paid me a visit on a farm outside Hyderabad. He was ostensibly interested in organic farming in the third world. In 2001 no one had heard of Dan Brown. We went to a dhaba for lunch, had beer, tandoori roti, dal fry and egg bhujia-my standard fare in a dhaba. Then he spoke.

'I have met your brother in the U. S. I know you are an atheist, irreligious and a Marxist-Anarchist. I don't insist that you believe in what I say or even respond. I just beg you to listen.'

'I belong, as you know, to a secret society that was created by St. Peter in the year 37 A.D. to protect the descendent of Jesus. I know that you are a Marxist scholar so I don't have to convince you about the following facts.'

1. US imperialism is controlled by Zionists, particularly the ultra rich Jew families of New York.
2. US imperialism is supporting Israel, apart from the Zionist angle,

to control the oil produced in that region.

3. The world is approaching 'Peak Oil' and US imperialism and capitalism have entered their last and losing battles in Iraq and Afghanistan.
4. We feel that the most decisive battle will be fought by mass mobilisation for an ethical and spiritual cause. I am aware that this is foreign and even distasteful to you.
5. We feel that it is time for the descendent of Jesus to come out and give spiritual leadership to the anti imperialist struggle. This will release immense energies among the masses.
6. You alone can locate him. Your family background and records uniquely make you an ideal candidate to do this job.'

'Thank you for listening to me. I trust that exposing my vulnerability to you will ensure keeping this meeting secret. Thank you once again.'

With this he picked up his hat, waved a good bye and boarded a bus to town.

So I was stuck. As we say in school mathematics, given:

1. Udupi district.
2. Fisherman's family.
3. Idealistic (probably)
4. Anti-evil-hopefully anti imperialist.
5. Male (hopefully).

To find out: Find him!

Actually it turned out quite simple. Shreekumar - Narmada Bachao Andolan activist, lived for some time at Sampoorna Kranti Vidyalaya, anti nuclear activist, appropriate technology enthusiast, I.I.Sc. Bangalore, fisher folk background! I probably had zeroed in on my man.

Still there were several problems. How was I to confirm that Shree is a descendent of Jesus? Did his family keep records, like

mine did? Even if they did, why would he trust me? And if they did not and if I were to tell him the ‘truth’, he would consider me a crank. The only course left for me was to take him at face value and enlist him in an anti-imperialist cause.

But that still would not release the kind of energy that was required. So in the end it was I who got enlisted. On the one hand I cultivated Shree on the grounds he tread and on the other I started working on an anti-imperialist strategy that meshed Marxist-Anarchist, Gandhian, Christian and a variety of social causes. I worked around ‘Peak Oil’, which not only helped to bring all these threads together, but also brought Shree, Vinay and me together to live on a farm commune on the foothills of the Western Ghats. We put together the book ‘Regaining Paradise: towards a fossil fuel free society’ by 2009. A loose end was Coelho. I enlisted Nyla Coelho (or did she manage to enlist herself?) as the editor and hoped that her family did not keep a record of their assignment.

But the break came unexpectedly. Vinay by accident located a reconstruction of how Jesus Christ may have actually looked done by a team of renowned anthropologists and palaeontologists. The picture was totally unlike the white Nordic European representation of Jesus depicted in the churches and paintings. In fact it was – you guessed it –an exact look alike of Shreekumar!

Vinay sent an email with the picture and added, ‘I will be damned, but I think I have seen this guy a lot.’

That clinched it, paving the way for tremendous synergy. The rest, as they say, is history.

Thomas Vijayendra

September 30, 2013

P.S.

By the Editors of the 2047 Edition.

Thomas Vijayendra ended his life on October 8, 2013, exactly at the age of 70, believing in the Biblical three scores and ten as the appropriate life span for man. In any case, his health deteriorated

rapidly after the publication of ‘Regaining Paradise’ and Vinay’s discovery. Also he did not believe in ‘Prolonging Death’ (it is the title of one of his essays). He had completed his mission! A few months before his death, in an interview he was asked what his dominant feeling was. He had replied, ‘Oh! The incredible loneliness of the long distance runner! All around me the dominant discourse is that all is well with the world. I alone seem to be aware of the looming crisis. Am I mad or do they all have their heads in the sand?’

Shreekumar died in 2035. His book, ‘Thermodynamics and Sustainability’ became a classic and turned countless engineers to agro-ecology. It is often compared to Schrodinger’s ‘What is Life?’ Several honours and prizes came in his way, which he politely declined, although he once confided that he was tempted to accept the Kapitza Prize. His brilliant tribute to Kapitza, ‘Engineers don’t win Nobel Prizes’ (Kapitza was the only engineer who actually did) is well known in the scientific community. Someone remarked that it reminded him of Einstein’s tribute to Newton!

M. F. Hussain sold his painting ‘The Asian Christ’ for a million dollars. The story goes that it was based on a photo essay of Sangatya farm done by a visitor. Several requests for a sitting in Dubai or offers of money were politely refused. Shreekumar refused to comment.

Vinay is still alive, white beard and all, is reclusive and is known as the atheist Saint of Nakre. His work on ethnomusicology in agriculture production processes is well known, his compositions are sung all over rural Karavali and have boosted organic farm productivity tremendously. His Karavali donkey breeding centre and the donkey cart design have created a revolution in local live stock and transportation. Every school child in Karavali owns a donkey now.

There are quite a few loose ends to the story. How and why did Nyla Coelho work herself into being the editor of ‘Regaining Paradise’ and get so close to the group? She died in 2045 and when her son Vivek (who has done some remarkable work on

flying amphibians of the Western Ghats) was approached, he cryptically remarked, ‘Mom was always a bit batty’. Was he referring to Nyla’s own work on the flying mammals—the bats or did she turn herself into one in the dead of night to draw blood? Did she really belong to the Coelho family whose ancestor sailed with Vasco de Gama? And did she change her mind after meeting the group? Or, are all these speculations worthless?

That is what Vinay Kumar thinks. He feels that Vijayendra should never have written this account. He wryly comments that Vijayendra should have used a rosary to control his itchy fingers rather than write such fiction!

He is also reticent about his interest in the Sufis, particularly in Shishunul Sharif and Baba Budan. It is known that St. Thomas Aquinas was helped by the Sufis in his journey to India through the land route. Was it pure chance that Vinay discovered the reconstruction of the real Jesus Christ? Questions! Questions!!

Editors

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T. Vijayendra (1943-) is a B. Tech. (Electronics from I.I.T. Kharagpur (1966). Over the last four and a half decades he has been involved in various social and political movements, such as trade unions, alternative journalism, libraries, bookshops, health, education and environment. For the last 5 years he has been active in the field of Peak Oil. He has been dividing time between living on organic farm in the foothills of the Western Ghats and Hyderabad watching birds and writing occasionally, mainly for the activist education in *Frontier* weekly from Kolkata.

These are stories about social and environmental issues.

The book begins with a story called Joy about the City of Joy - Kolkata. Then there are three stories which may be called the Requiem series. They deal with alternatives in education, farming and environment issues. They are somewhat satirical and critical about the way these issues have been tackled in the last few decades. Instead of critical essays, they have been presented as stories.

The collection moves to death only when our old friend Nora turns a murderer by chance. In the author's last book she was the good woman of Bilgram. Here she gets away with murder in three stories. Then the last but one story is about euthanasia and in the last story the author kills himself! So these stories are about Life, Death and Requiem!

*You can read this book online or download
a copy at SCRIBD: vijayendra tungabhadra*